Hepatitis C: The Shame Game



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The curse of casinos
Gambling is fast becoming the country's new national pastime. And while casinos bring new jobs and government revenues, they also result in a host of social ills, from gambling addiction and marriage breakdowns to increased personal bankruptcies



PETER BREGG/MACLEAN'S

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TOM HANSEN



56 *Seinfeld* follies
With luck, Jerry, Elaine, George and Kramer will make their farewell without betraying the show's spirit and taking themselves too seriously

From The Editor

The 'file' is all that matters



It is difficult to think of your mother as a file, but that is the cruel image that Health Minister Allan Rock evoked last week. It was bad enough that, with accustomed Liberal arrogance, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien turned what should have been a vote of conscience into a party-line vote, with all whips flying. Then Rock stood up, looked the hepatitis C folk in the eye and declared: "The file is closed."

The remark betrayed the official Ottawa mind-set that too easily reduces every human tragedy or controversy to a "file" that can be lugged around and managed. It is the same kind of attitude that trivializes a tragedy by referring to the "hep C victims," as Reform MP Reed Elley did in one fiery exchange in Question Period.



Rock: betraying the official Ottawa mind-set

And when it was all over, what did the pundits and politicos do late last week? They repaired to their favorite watering holes to drink in the bathwater about whether Rock's leadership ambitions were hurt or whether Reform had outflanked the Liberals on a social policy issue.

How cynical and so typically out of touch life in that cocoon on the Rideau can be.

The provincial politicians did not do themselves any favors either. Having agreed on a compensation package in February that excluded an unknown number of people who got hepatitis C before 1986, last week they raised their trembling little voices in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia to change the terms of the deal. In Quebec City, Liberal Leader Daniel Johnson took one last swing at his old federal Liberal foes by moving a motion to extend assistance to all people with hepatitis C—and guess what, members of the separatist PQ government fell all over themselves to embrace his call that Ottawa pay the full shot. This is the same bunch that usually goes ballistic at even the hint that the feds may be launching a national spending program.

When the dust had settled at week's end, there were no winners—and many questions that demanded answers. One of them is how many people actually contracted hepatitis C before the 1986 cutoff and how many are in need of some form of assistance. Late last week, in an interview with *Maclean's*, Dr. Sam Lee, president of the Canadian Society for the Study of the Liver, said that the number of people infected with hepatitis C who will become gravely ill has been exaggerated. And Jeremy Beaty, president of the Hepatitis C Society of Canada, flatly accuses Ottawa of pumping up the figure to scare taxpayers about the potential cost of a compensation package. Lee, admitting that even raising questions may outrage some sufferers, nonetheless went on to propose that Ottawa and the provinces compensate only those patients who develop serious symptoms. "I would pay them a stipend, not a lump sum, with the idea that this would stop if better therapy became available and their disease was eradicated," he told *Maclean's* (page 18).

The issue that Lee raises needs to be aired more fully. Instead of the circus atmosphere generated by the politicians, perhaps this week could be devoted to some quiet inquiries. People over files.

Robert Lewis

Newsroom Notes:

Home from Havana

It was an eventful week for Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. After an historic visit to Havana to try to coax Fidel Castro in from the cold, Chrétien returned to Ottawa to deal with his own political problems related to the storm over hepatitis C compensation. "After Castro bid farewell to the Prime Minister, he remained on the tarmac to talk to Cuban reporters," said *Maclean's* Ottawa Editor Bruce Wallace, who accompanied Chrétien on the trip. "In his haste to get back to Ottawa for the non-confidence vote, the Prime Minister's plane practically ran over Castro's toes to get away on time."



Chrétien with Wallace during interview at Rideau Gate: distracted by political grief

Wallace saw the Prime Minister again the next day at Rideau Gate in Ottawa, where Chrétien spoke exclusively to *Maclean's* about his visit with Castro. "Chrétien should have been on a high from the Havana visit," says Wallace. "But he seemed far too distracted by the political grief he was getting at home."

The series of hepatitis C stories, plus a cover package on gambling, were edited by a man who had his own eventful week—Nation Editor Peeter Kopvillem.



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The Mail



TOM ARMSTRONG

Vriend (right), partner Andrew Gagnon, polarizing?

preserve of Parliament and provincial assemblies. That simple principle is a cornerstone of democracy.

Roger Davidson
Cornwall, Ont.

Human rights

Barbara Amiel's view is based on a fundamental error. As a member of Alberta's Human Rights Commission, permit me to clarify. Amiel writes that the Supreme Court ruling forcing Alberta to include sexual orientation in its list of forbidden grounds of discrimination means that "if a religious school decides all its professors must share the views of some Christians that homosexuality is an abomination, it will no longer be free to hire only those teachers who practise this view" ("Yes to human rights, no to the commissions," April 27). It does not mean this. Bona fide occupational requirements—such as belief systems in religious schools—are reasonable and justifiable grounds for discrimination in employment. Insurance companies discriminate against young male drivers, teachers discriminate against poor exam writers, and *Maclean's* discriminates against shoddy journalists, all on "reasonable and justifiable" grounds.

W P Buergen,
Stettler, Alta.

Barbara Amiel argues that human rights legislation is designed only to satisfy special interest groups. In stating that she would employ, house or service an "African Canadian, Hindu homosexual" only polarizes the view of human rights legislation. Furthermore, she wrote that "equal treatment is very rarely extended to men." In fact, a Catholic, Caucasian, heterosexual male is also protected against discrimination on the basis of his sex, religion, race and sexual orientation. If this seems more absurd than Amiel's example, then there is all the more reason for human rights legislation.

Stephen Betschel
Toronto

Bravo to Barbara Amiel on human rights commissions. The statism that tries to solve all social problems by new forms of discrimination moves our society from reason and merit to sentimentality and bureaucratic whim—and we all suffer.

Wilmer Penner,
Steinbach, Man.

Viewing democracy

The premise posited by Bruce Wallace in his column "Potshots at the judiciary" (April 27) is summed up in his closing: "They just have to be able to withstand popular frenzies." Now, that's a jaundiced view of democracy. Wallace appears to dismiss the anger and consternation expressed by Canadians regarding the recent Supreme Court decision in the Delwin Vriend case. As well, the columnist refers to the dismay expressed by Albertans as "the grassfire sweeping Alberta." It's entirely possible that the air up where Wallace sits and writes is so thin as to cause him to miss the point. The reason why the great unwashed are upset may have more to do with the dismissive arrogance of the court in exceeding its jurisdictional and legal authority and stepping into the political arena by defining and setting social policy, than any bias against homosexuals, homosexuality or the judiciary. The development of social policy is the exclusive

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The effects of drugs

Your article on the side-effects of prescription drugs ("Death from side-effects," Health, April 27) was all too poignant for me. I said a final farewell to my dad last September. After many years of pretty good health (he was still painting and decorating at the age of 72), my dad's rheumatoid arthritis began about five years ago. He was advised by a specialist to undergo a course of treatment with gold injections. Thus began his dance of death with the medical profession/pharmaceutical industry. From a gold-salts bone-marrow attack, through a cortisone-induced weakened heart, shingles from a compromised immune system, supposed "last-resort" splenectomy complete with a too-soon discharge and near-fatal blood clots on his lung, massive weight loss and wasting thanks to a bungled hospital stay for kidney stones to an ultimately lost battle with antibiotic-resistant pneumonia, he seemed to be on the short end of the pharmaceutical odds no matter which drug was administered next. And each time it was usually to counteract the toxic side-effects of the previous one. Unfortunately, my dad put his faith in the pharmaceutical industry and the medical establishment.

Maggie Laidlaw,
Guelph, Ont.

Medicinal correctness

I hope your article opened a few eyes to one of the many-faceted problems associated with the use of otherwise excellent modern medicines. For instance, you say the "researchers suggest that correctly administered drugs kill an average of 106,000 people a year in the United States." But who out there is deciding what is correct and what is incorrect? Likely the prescriber, about whom Dr. Tom Perry, a Vancouver clinical pharmacologist in your story, notes "how hard it is to understand one drug well, let alone dozens or hundreds." To me, what is at fault here is not the drugs, not the physicians, but the system we use to distribute the drugs to the public. Ways must be found to take some of the pressure off physicians, already overburdened with unreasonable requests from the public, plus drug manufacturer blandishments from their representatives and from medical journal advertising. One way to do that is to encourage people to be more responsible for their own health care. But in light of the glut of information on medicines available in the media and now on the Internet—almost all of which

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encourages more use of medicines, both traditional and alternative—we, the public first need an unbiased and non-intimidating intermediary, such as newly graduated pharmacists, to help sort it out, including the advice given us by our doctors and our sales-motivated community pharmacists. Governments spend enormous sums of money protecting us from ourselves. They could spend a small sum protecting us from misused medicines.

John Hill
Brantford, Ont.

Sensitive writing

Reading your review of *Birthday Letters* by Ted Hughes was a very moving experience for me ("Remembering Sylvia," Books, April 27). I want to compliment you on your sensitive and thoughtful comments. I was particularly struck by the wisdom expressed in the last paragraph of the review. Thank you for a memorable reading experience. Now I must buy the book.

Eleanor Allgood,
Trondheim, Norway

Riel's citizenship

A major point about Metis leader Louis Riel, which is not well known, often ignored and sometimes studiously discounted after fleeing Manitoba, he was elected to Parliament as the Red River Settlement representative. There was a price on his head, but he went to Ottawa anyway to assume his seat. He was refused that right. Riel then fled to the United States, where he lived for 15 years. During that time, he took out American citizenship. If the bill by MPs Reg Alcock of Winnipeg and Denis Coderre of Montreal passes, we will be naming a national day after a U.S. citizen ("Rehabilitating Riel," Opening Notes, April 27).

Peter Warren,
CJOB Radio
Winnipeg

The Road Ahead

Expecting the unexpected

Premier Lucien Bouchard is right in a way: the question of Quebec separation is not a legal issue to be determined by the Supreme Court of Canada. It is really not a political issue, either, in the normal sense of the word. It is an emotional/gut issue. Politicians and citizens in both camps seem to think the matter can be held within the bounds of law or negotiations, and it is common among politicians and academics outside Quebec to assert that there will be no resort to violence. The simple fact is that Quebec is probably going to leave one way or the other, the question for us outside Quebec is not one of departure but what assets Quebec is going to be allowed to take, and how much of our joint indebtedness Quebec is going to accept.

History can be boring, but "the road behind" has relevance to "the road ahead." In Quebec, the church hierarchy established an educational system that encouraged a pastoral, near-theocratic state. The values given pre-eminence were familial, parochial and agricultural, with a strong sense of ethnic, religious and lingual identity. Mothers were encouraged to have large families to overcome the population effects of British and Loyalist immigration to Quebec. Matters of commerce and industry were considered too base for an educated French-Canadian to indulge in. The niches left vacant were quickly occupied by the commercially aggressive *anglais*, who later tapped the huge uneducated and unskilled labor pool. Thus formed a pattern where a mainly non-French-Canadian managerial class stood over a mainly French-Canadian labor class.

Is it any wonder that feelings ranging from resentment through humiliation, anger and even amused contempt seethed in the Quebec populace? But it was misdirected rather than blaming their own leaders and elites for leading them to objectives inappropriate in the modern world, they blamed the English, who were everywhere before them as a target. Such feelings are emotional dynamite.

The question is not going to be settled in the Supreme Court of Canada. Nor is it likely to be settled by negotiation in a manner satisfactory to most Canadians. Who is going to "negotiate" the inclusion of the Cree into a new state of Quebec? Who is going to "negotiate" a fair share of the national debt to be assumed by Quebec? Who is going to "negotiate" the disposition of the federal infrastructure, including such vital works as the St. Lawrence Seaway? Who is going to "negotiate" a permanent physical corridor between Ontario and New Brunswick? Who is going to "negotiate" in regard to the northern lands assigned to Quebec in the early part of this century, or vital parts of the South Shore and the Eastern Townships ceded to Canada by Britain?

There is little confidence here in the West that the current government will represent the interests of ordinary Canadians. So when push comes to shove, will there be violence? Perhaps, since the beliefs and values at the core of the dispute are deeply held, emotional, from the gut. And when the unspeakable and unexpected erupts, it is likely it will be settled not from within, but by some heavy hand from outside—operating in the name of the United Nations, of course.

Maurice A. Rhodes,
Nelson, B.C.

The Road Ahead invites readers to advance specific solutions to Canada's political, social and economic problems. Unpublished submissions may run condensed as regular letters or appear on an electronic bulletin board.

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THE MAIL

Digital or analog?

The article "Cellular confusion" (Technology, April 27) perhaps added to the confusion by propagating the common misconception that PCS is digital and cellular is analog. While PCS is all digital, it does not follow that cellular is all analog. The difference between PCS and cellular is simply the frequency band that the signal is transmitted in, 800 MHz for cellular and 1800 MHz for PCS (although Cantel AT&T has muddied the waters by advertising Digital PCS, which actually is a digital system operating in the cellular frequency bands). Since the frequency of operation makes little difference to the consumer, the difference between cellular and PCS largely boils down to price and coverage. Your article also claimed that PCS phones have "better sound quality" than analog cellular. This is a matter of opinion, and many would claim the "gold standard" for wireless voice is still analog.

David Crowe
Editor, Cellular Networking Perspectives
Calgary

'A done deal'

The proposed megabank mergers in Canada and the United States may be getting all the press ("The challengers," Business, April 27), but perhaps the real banking news is the startling success of micro-banks around the world. Beginning 20 years ago, microcredit has offered opportunity to millions of the poorest people on earth. Over 8,000 microcredit institutions now offer tiny loans (averaging about $100) to destitute people to generate income through self-employment. Numerous independent studies have documented the results: higher incomes, better health and better school attendance. Micro-banking now functions on a large scale. The Grameen Bank of Bangladesh has more than two million borrowers, most of them village women, in one of the world's poorest countries. Yet the on-time repayment rate is 98 per cent. The Grameen Bank is now self-reliant, and uses the international markets to secure financing for its operations. There is the real news: a mega-micro-bank, where the interests of customers, not global strategy, come first.

Blaise Salmon,
Victoria

Boffed, porked, bugled and pilloried again. "There will be no mergers in the banking sector," says federal Finance Minister Paul Martin, "until we are convinced that is what is best for Canadians". Horsepuckeys. It's a done deal. Martin knows it, God knows it, the universe knows it. In spite of past reassurances, from government and industry alike, the result has been a loss of jobs and price increases. Martin's posturing in Parliament is only meant to appear to soften the blow of job losses and hidden service charges going vertical before they come. When Martin took his seat after delivering his remarks, it was evident from the smirk on his face that even he could barely contain himself from bursting into laughter.

Bob Nucich
Revelstoke, B.C.

Facts about Ireland

Without wishing to be caught up in the whole debate over Ireland, I wish to correct one statement in your editorial of April 27 ("Bringing old foes together," From the Editor). You describe the republicans as "wanting the six counties of the northern province returned to the Republic of Ireland.' Those six counties never were part of the Republic, and so cannot be returned. The 26 counties of the Republic voted to secede from the United Kingdom, the other six decided to stay.

Robert S. Dilley,
Professor,
Department of geography,
Lakehead University,
Thunder Bay, Ont.

If the acts of terrorism noted in "Real peace at last?" (World, April 20) were indeed "indiscriminately" carried out by Northern Ireland's Protestants and Catholics for the past 30 years, then neither side is very adept at guerrilla warfare. Otherwise, the average annual death toll would have been higher than 113 and there may not have been enough live bodies left to negotiate the Belfast Agreement. The fact is that most Protestants and most Catholics in this six-county statelet have not been terrorists, and those who have been were, like the unmentioned British army, usually discriminate in their choice of targets.

William A. Kearns
Cooperstown, N.Y.

GREAT CANADIANS

For the July 1 issue, *Maclean's* is preparing a list of the 100 Most Important Canadians in History. We invite readers to submit nominations in the following 10 categories: Nation-Builders; Thinkers and Writers; Entrepreneurs; Artists; Discoverers; Activists; Characters; Stars; Heroes; Scientists. The project is being organized for *Maclean's* by the noted historian J. L. Granatstein. Nominations can be sent by mail, fax or e-mail (addresses on page 4), or be posted at *Maclean's* Online (*www.macleans.ca*).



Maclean's
WHAT MATTERS TO CANADIANS

Editorial Update

Writers in Electronic Residence @ www.macleans.ca

Searching for some stimulating conversation? Maclean's—in partnership with Writers in Electronic Residence—now offers people an opportunity to discuss current literary or news events and issues with a diverse lineup of Canada's leading writers via its website www.macleans.ca. Each month a different writer hosts Maclean's electronic literary salon, posting new pieces for discussion each week. Throughout May share thoughts with novelist, short-story writer and playwright **Leon Rooke**, and in June compare notes with short-story writer Andrew Pyper.



Canada at War

For nearly a century Maclean's has published some of the finest writing on war, bringing the horrors and triumphs of the battlefield to the printed page. *Canada at War* is a critically-acclaimed collection of previously-published Maclean's articles that highlight heroic individual experiences from the First and Second World Wars through to Canadian peacekeeping efforts in Cyprus, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. Published by Penguin Books Canada, *Canada at War* is now available in stores everywhere.

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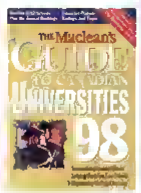


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Hosted by Pamela Wallin, this weekly half-hour show provides a vivid look at the people and news from the pages of Maclean's. Maclean's TV is television worth watching. Watch Maclean's TV on CBC Newsworld every Sunday at 4:30 p.m. ET/1:30 p.m. PT and earlier at 7:30 a.m. ET/4:30 a.m. PT.

The Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities 1998

This definitive guide features comprehensive current profiles of each school, detailing popular courses, professors, services and hangouts, plus information on residence facilities and co-op opportunities. In addition to Maclean's exclusive university rankings, there is valuable advice for international students and a complete directory to Canadian community colleges. For those considering a legal career, a 23-page survey of the country's common-law schools is included. This year, in recognition of sky-rocketing tuition costs, Maclean's editorial team presents a new 40-plus page report on entrance scholarships, as well as savings and loans programs for students.



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Charles Gordon

Why cultural Canada has yet to come of age

One big Canadian cultural event follows another. Picasso is in Ottawa, Ken Finkleman is on the CBC, so is Peter Gzowski again. Atom Egoyan gets an Academy Award nomination, writers are celebrated on Canada Book Day. What does it all mean? All of these things have something to do with stardom and our attitude to it, which isn't always helpful.

The Picasso exhibition at the National Gallery follows in the recent tradition, both in Ottawa and other places, of the superstar show. Ottawa has had Degas and Renoir in recent years. The Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto has had the Barnes and next month will have the Courtauld. The superstar shows have been successes, by and large, attracting large crowds, selling lots of T-shirts and coffee mugs. Yet there has been the criticism that in pursuing big international shows, the galleries are neglecting Canadian artists, stepping away from their mandate in order to attract the tourist trade.

It is the same argument directed at theatres that present megamusicals and the answers are the same as well: putting on the Big Show brings people into the tent, people into the National Gallery, say, who would not otherwise go there. They see the publicity about Picasso and they go to the gallery. Once there, they enjoy the experience enough to come back another time and look at some paintings that are less famous, perhaps paintings by Canadians.

It is the argument, essentially, that is made on behalf of all popularizers, and it is not a bad one. Perhaps the majority of the Picasso seekers will see only Picasso, buy the souvenir shopping bag and leave, never to return. And perhaps seeing *Phantom of the Opera* constitutes the year's entire theatregoing for the majority of those who attend it. But there will always be some who are intrigued by art or theatre, and decide to see more.

In the meantime, the argument continues, we should not be afraid of superstars, we should not shy away from trying to put on the big show. On the other hand, we should not allow ourselves to be defined only in terms of superstars. Another Canadian cultural event—Canadian, because it is watched in more Canadian homes than most hockey games—is the Academy Awards. This year, a Canadian director, Atom Egoyan, was nominated. That gave arts commentators the occasion to say, once again, that Canada's film industry had come of age.

Without taking anything away from Egoyan's film, *The Sweet Hereafter*, it is nonsense to say that. The fact that we produce an internationally acclaimed movie does not mean we have a mature film industry. We can have a mature film industry with no international acclaim at all, if only we can produce Canadian audiences for Canadian films. The jury is still out on that, given the fact that so few Canadian movies are available on Canadian screens. Egoyan's was, as was Thom Fitzgerald's *The Hanging Garden*. During one brief, heady and rare period last year it was possible to venture out on a Friday night in many Canada cities and have a choice of not one, but two Canadian movies on our multinationally controlled screens.

Put it this way: when Canadian films of good, but not outstanding quality are watched by enough Canadians so that the film-makers can make a living, our film industry will have come of age. It is nice to have Academy Award nominations, but better to have Canadian movies available in Canadian theatres.

Similar thoughts arise from Canada Book Day, which has just made its third appearance. Various events, plain and fancy, were held across the country to raise consciousness about Canada's books and authors and there was a lot of talk too about Canadian literature coming of age. The honors heaped internationally upon such writers as Carol Shields, Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje were cited as evidence of a healthy Canadian publishing scene.

But it should be noted that the great majority of writers invited to attend the various Canada Book Day functions came there from their day jobs. That is unfortunate because just below the rank of the superstars are perhaps two dozen other writers whose stuff is of a quality to attract international attention too, given the happy accident of being noticed by the right people. The existence of that solid middle rank of writers is what really points to a literature that has come of age—except for the fact that those in the middle rank are not making a living producing it.

> We can take pride but no comfort in the fact that a handful of our artists have become famous worldwide

All of which is a way of saying that we can take pride but no comfort in the fact that a handful of our artists have become famous worldwide. The pride comes from Academy Awards, Booker and Pulitzer prizes. The comfort will come when we are able to support those who are less famous—support them not with grants or subsidies, necessarily, but with lineups at the box office and the bookstore cash register.

It would not do to be too pessimistic. The growth in both the quality and quantity of artistic achievement in the past 20 years or so has been spectacular in all fields. A growth in public consciousness now follows, a bit more slowly, and perhaps a growth in markets is next. And after that, we could reach the stage where Canadians can be as celebrated at home as they are abroad, and where, at the same time, they need not feel the need to go abroad to be celebrated.

Which is where we come in. In these post-deficit times, we could prevail upon government to increase opportunities for Canadian artists. In our personal post-deficit times, we could be prevailed upon to turn off the VCR and venture out of the house, to watch a Canadian play or a Canadian movie, to buy a Canadian novel, to be, in the best sense of the term, patrons of the arts.

Opening Notes

Edited by TANYA DAVIES

NASA tastes a special delicacy from Canada



Hadfield: stocking the space shuttle's 'junk food drawer' with musk ox jerky

When astronaut Chris Hadfield becomes the first Canadian to walk in space next year, he will be refuelling with a distinctly Canadian treat—musk ox jerky. The 38-year-old native of Sarnia, Ont., plans to stock the space shuttle's "junk food drawer" with the dried meat for the fall, 1999, flight. The seven-member crew is part of an "assembly mission" to the International Space Station, which will be operational by the year 2002.

Hadfield first savored musk ox jerky last August when he was on a goodwill tour of the Northwest Territories. One of his stops was at Kitikmeot Foods Ltd. in Cambridge Bay, which specializes in traditional northern native foods such as smoked arctic char and the jerky. Hadfield took some samples to Houston, where he works at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center (he lives nearby with his wife, Helene, and their three children). "They went over really well—they were such a different kind of food that no one had tried here." But the engineer thinks the char is too odorous for the shuttle. "Think of a VW without any windows," he laughs. "I need to think about the whole crew." Hadfield will also bring a supply of musk ox for the three-member crew who will orbit the earth for five months while assembling the International Space Station. With luck, the Canadian delicacy could soon become the Official Jerky of Space Travel.



NORM BETTS/TORONTO SUN

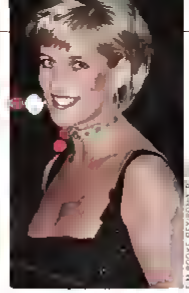
Thompson: a wife and on-line advocate

Standing by her man on the Web

Amy Thompson is standing by her man, '90s-style. The wife of Andrew Thompson, who resigned from the Senate in March after being suspended for his poor attendance, has been busy defending her 73-year-old hubby, using the Internet as her soapbox. Since mid-April, she has written weekly items on the *Maclean's* forum Web site (*http://www.macleans.ca*) presenting her side of the story, and her opinions on the Senate. The gist of her posts: that Andrew has been unable to attend meetings because of cancer, which led the couple to go Mexico for an alternative treatment not available in Canada, and that it is impossible to reform an institution that has become obsolete. In a phone interview from the couple's house in La Paz, Mexico, Amy Thompson declared, "Since I know the real facts, I will put myself on the line."

And on-line. But so far, the response from other visitors to the *Maclean's* forum has been minimal. Meanwhile, Thompson hopes that other senators will see her submissions. One topic she has been holding forth on is replacing the traditional Senate with a cyber format—"It will save a lot of money." Thompson also logged the only nomination for her husband to be one of the 100 most important Canadians in history, a feature running in the July 1 issue of *Maclean's*. "I was just kidding around," she says when asked about it. But when it comes to defending her man, there's no fooling around for Amy Thompson.

Besmirching Diana's legacy



TIM MOORE REUTERS/TR

The princess: 'kitsch marketing' of her death

In the nine months since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, products have appeared bearing her image or signature to raise money for the Princess's memorial charity. The marketing hit a low point recently with release of Diana margarine in England. One company's tongue-in-cheek reaction to such products is the Diana Tunnel Racer, an Internet game created last December by FORK Unstable Media of Hamburg, Germany. Visitors to the site take a virtual drive through Paris in a Mercedes-Benz, in scenes that attempt to re-create the fatal crash. "The game is a reaction to the kitsch marketing of Diana's death," says David Linderman, FORK's creative director. "We never intended to target the family or incite anger."

The RCMP takes the guns away

The RCMP's unpaid but uniformed auxiliary cops in British Columbia are up in arms—over the right to be armed. Traditionally, auxiliary RCMP officers in Canada have not carried guns, performing only community service or traffic and crowd control. The exception is British Columbia where, since 1986, forces have allowed volunteers to be armed. But on April 3, the ministry of the attorney general suspended the auxiliaries' right to bear firearms, and announced that it was reviewing the policy on behalf of the RCMP and Vancouver city police. The organizations are worried about the liability of auxiliary officers using deadly force. This has become a concern as volunteers are being asked to arrest suspects, due to the cutback of over time hours of regular officers.

The decision has provoked an outcry from the volunteers, who claim they need guns to safely carry out their responsibilities. In protest, many are only working on weekends. Still, Vancouver-based RCMP spokesman Sgt. Russ Grabb says that the review is about safety. He notes that while auxiliaries are taught to fire a gun, there is no training for when and how to use it in a dangerous situation. "These are split-second decisions," says Grabb. "You don't get to go away and think about them."

BEST-SELLERS

FICTION

1. **Pandora,** *Anne Rice (1)*
2. **Cold Mountain** *Charles Frazier (7)*
3. **Barney's Version,** *Mordecai Richler (4)*
4. **Larry's Party,** *Carol Shields (10)*
5. **The Street Lawyer,** *John Grisham (3)*
6. **Girlfriend in a Coma,** *Douglas Coupland (2)*
7. **N is for Noose,** *Sue Grafton*
8. **Birthday Letters,** *Ted Hughes (8)*
9. **A Widow for One Year,** *John Irving*
10. **Cloudspitter** *Russell Banks (5)*

NONFICTION

1. **The Cult of Impotence,** *Linda McQuaig (1)*
2. **The Gifts of the Jews,** *Thomas Cahill (2)*
3. **Better Living** *Mark Kingwell (3)*
4. **Angela's Ashes,** *Frank McCourt (6)*
5. **The Millionaire Next Door,** *Thomas Stanley and William Danko (7)*
6. **Talking to Heaven,** *James Van Praagh (3)*
7. **The Man Who Listens to Horses,** *Monty Roberts (5)*
8. **Reflections of a Siamese Twin** *John Ralston Saul (10)*
9. **Who Killed Canadian History?** *Jack Granatstein*
10. **Simple Abundance,** *Sarah Ban Breathnach (4)*

() Position last week Compiled by Brian Bethune

POP MOVIES

When worlds collide



Leading the summer barrage of blockbuster flicks is *Deep Impact*. Though it is surprisingly heavy on Academy Award winners and nominees—Robert Duvall, Vanessa Redgrave and Morgan Freeman—the real star of the movie is a computer-generated comet on a fatal collision course with Earth. The ensuing damage is a special effects bonanza.

Top movies in Canada, ranked according to box office receipts during the seven days that ended on April 30. (In brackets: numbers of screens/weeks showing.)

1	**The Big Hit** *(124/1)*	$1,569,550
2	**City of Angels** *(143/3)*	$942,560
3	**Titanic** *(153/19)*	$735,120
4	**The Object of My Affection** *(114/2)*	$632,920
5	**Lost in Space** *(140/4)*	$372,190
6	**Mercury Rising** *(121/4)*	$252,370
7	**Pookie** *(79/2)*	$249,480
8	**Good Will Hunting** *(61/19)*	$240,720
9	**The Spanish Prisoner** *(23/1)*	$180,970
10	**As Good as It Gets** *(62/19)*	$156,250

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Hook, line, sinker

Chris Gudgeon's latest book, *Consider The Fish: Fishing for Canada from Campbell River to Petty Harbour* is a mixture of travelogue, fishing guide and history. Intrigued by how intrinsic fishing is to the Canadian identity, Gudgeon visits communities across the country to learn their history and lore—and try to catch a fish or two.

Passages



DIED: Broadcasting magnate **John Bassett,** 82, at his home, in Toronto. Bassett started his career as a reporter at the *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, which was owned by his family. In the 1950s, he became co-owner and publisher of *The Toronto Telegram*, closing the daily in 1971 because it was losing money. In 1960, he and the Eaton family formed Baton Broadcasting Inc., with the television station CFTO, which became the flagship of the CTV network. Bassett retired in 1980, but remained chairman of Baton until 1986. His Toronto funeral was attended by political and business notables such as **Ethel Kennedy**, widow of former U.S. senator **Robert Kennedy**. **Conrad Black** and former prime ministers **John Turner** and **Joe Clark** (page 43 and 60).

DIED: Former hockey player and coach **Hal Laycoe,** 75, following intestinal surgery, in Vancouver. Laycoe played 11 seasons with the National Hockey League before becoming a coach in 1956. He was the first coach of the expansion Vancouver Canucks team in 1970.

DIED: Former Black Panther leader **Eldridge Cleaver,** 62, in Pomona, Calif. Cleaver was one of the original Black Panthers in 1966, and his 1968 book, *Soul on Ice*, became the seminal work of the group.

DIED: Leading Arab poet **Nizar Qabbani,** 75, of a heart attack, in London. Qabbani was a Syrian diplomat before he turned to writing.

AWARDED: The 1998 National Business Book Award, to **Anthony Bianco,** 44, in Toronto. New York City-based Bianco won the $10,000 prize for his book *The Reichmanns*.

AWARDED: The 1998 Laureat Canada Gold Medal for science and engineering, to Ottawa based chemical scientist **Keith Ingold,** 69, in Ottawa.

APPDINTED: **Ken Whyte,** 37, as editor of the still-unnamed Conrad Black newspaper, which will launch in the fall, in Toronto. Whyte has been editor of *Saturday Night* magazine since 1994.

SPECIAL REPORT

THE SHAME GAME

Accusations fly as the compensation package for hepatitis C haunts the Liberal government

BY JOHN DeMONT

From the moment he first stood in the House of Commons in 1993 as a rookie MP and cabinet minister, Allan Rock claimed to be repulsed by the Kabuki ritual of parliamentary Question Period. "I've never been comfortable with heckling or name-calling or finger-pointing," he explained last Friday after the last stormy exchanges of a long, exhausting week in the House. But as Rock sat back in the relative serenity of his Parliament Hill office, in the wildest stretch of a political career that has been anything but sedate, he knew he had dished it out as good as he got it.

After a month of being on the receiving end of an excruciating beating over the limited federal-provincial compensation package for Canadians infected with hepatitis C through tainted blood, Rock had dropped his cool, impassive mask. The turning point came when he thrust a finger into the air as he roasted Independent MP John Nunziata for striding across the Commons to try to pin a victim-support ribbon on his lapel. Later, he lashed out at provincial health ministers for the "empty, hollow, cynical exercise" of agreeing to the deal—which limits compensation to what Ottawa estimates are 22,000 people who contracted the virus between 1986 and 1990—then asking the federal government to compensate all victims without coughing up more cash themselves. Finally, he retired to his office, removed his suit coat and warned—the defiance evident in his voice—that no matter how long the hepatitis C fight drags on, "I'll be there."

It may be a long time. By week's end, Rock thought he had a deal—again—with nine of the provinces, Quebec being the sole exception, to stick to the original compensation package. But the controversy has been supposedly buried before, yet still manages to return to haunt the Liberal government. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien thought he was bringing closure by whipping the Liberal caucus into voting en masse against an opposition Reform party motion earlier in the week urging compensation for all.

The government won the vote and lost the public relations battle in the uproar that followed. "The file is closed," Rock declared, igniting a further wave of outrage from people with hepatitis C—among them 15-year-old Joey Hache of Russell, Ont., who, along with others, demonstrated on Parliament Hill. Hache contracted the disease through frequent transfusions necessitated by a rare blood disorder, and may in fact be eligible for compensation. But, he said last week, "there are other people out there who need it."

Others accused Rock of overstating the total number of cases in an effort to exaggerate the potential cost of compensation (page 19). Weeping victims had to be strong-armed out of the House of Commons visitors gallery; Liberal caucus members groused publicly about being forced to back their Prime Minister. And as the public backlash grew throughout the week, provincial governments began to slip away from the Feb. 17 deal in which Ottawa pledged $800 million and the provinces $300 million for those who contracted the virus between 1986 and 1990. Last week, Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario, after originally signing on to Rock's pact, were suddenly calling for the federal government to compensate all hepatitis C sufferers, no matter when they contracted the disease, while the Quebec national assembly unanimously passed a resolution by then-Liberal Leader Daniel Johnson calling for Ottawa to pay for aid to all as well. "This deal has to be reopened," gloated Reform party strategist Rick Anderson after watching the party's MPs spend yet another Question Period pounding at Rock's open political wound. "This is a government on the ropes."

The Grits made it back to their corner—but just barely. For a party that prides



Rock in the House: lashing out at provincial health ministers for an 'empty, hollow, cynical exercise'

TOM HANSON/CANAPRESS



WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

Although variants of liver disease known as hepatitis have been recognized for centuries, it is only within the past 50 years that their transmission by blood or blood products has become a significant concern. The current controversy swirls around a potentially fatal variant, hepatitis C, unidentified until 1989. It is a viral infection, spread by direct blood-to-blood contact. Since screening has kept it out of Canada's public blood supply since 1990, the main sources of infection include injection drug use or sharing personal hygiene items such as toothbrushes, dental floss and razors, or body piercing such as tattooing. There is no vaccine. Most of its victims never show symptoms, and some suffer just minor flu-like illness. Others experience mild to severe tiredness, appetite loss, vomiting, fever and soreness in the abdomen and joints. Beyond that, an estimated 15 to 20 per cent will develop cirrhosis, or scarring of the liver, within two decades of infection's onset, and half of those will develop liver cancer. Other types:

- **Hepatitis A:** Formerly known as infectious hepatitis, it is transmitted through contaminated food or water or improper hand washing after a bowel movement. About 1,500 cases a year are reported in Canada, causing weakness, headache and fever; stomach cramps; loss of appetite, diarrhea, darkened urine; and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Most people recover fully and develop immunity. About three per cent over age 40 die. It occurs in small outbreaks and can be prevented by a vaccine.
- **Hepatitis B:** Formerly known as serum hepatitis (because it was sometimes transmitted in blood products before a screening test for that variant was introduced in 1971), it is spread through sexual contact, sharing needles and syringes or personal hygiene items. There are approximately 100,000 carriers in Canada and about 3,000 new cases reported each year. When symptoms occur, in a minority of victims, they are similar to those of hepatitis A. About one per cent of those with acute cases die, and 15 to 25 per cent of carriers die from cirrhosis or liver cancer. Hepatitis B, too, can be prevented by a vaccine.
- **Hepatitis D:** Rare and found only in patients with active hepatitis B, mostly injection drug users. Symptoms, when they occur, are similar to those of other forms of hepatitis.
- **Hepatitis E:** Caused by poor sanitation, it is not found in Canada, except among travellers to countries with a high incidence. Symptoms are similar to those of hepatitis A.

itself on a reputation for compassion, it was grating for them to see hard hearted Reformers looking like the sympathetic ones. But the government position was formed out of a fear that helping all victims—Ottawa delayed until 1990 the implementation of a new screening test that the United States began using in 1986—would open the federal government to countless legal actions by others who felt betrayed by Canada's medical system. It was a hard position to rally around with enthusiasm, and the Liberal caucus meeting last week was a dispirited gathering. At one point, Chretien criticized other front-bench ministers for failing to rally to Rock's aid (later, several Liberal MPs indicated they would continue to fight).

All the pent-up anger and frustration came pouring out at the provinces, who now suddenly wanted to broaden the package with only Ottawa covering the bills. The Prime Minister, fresh off the plane from an official trip to Cuba and anxious to give Rock some much-needed support, laced into Quebec for "passing the buck to the federal government," and chided Ontario Premier Mike Harris in person, during a Toronto celebration to mark the 50th anniversary of the state of Israel, for his province's about-face.

Chretien's aggressiveness emboldened Rock, who painted his provincial counterparts as callous hypocrites. "I was the one who was in the room last summer when the minister of health for Ontario said he would not discuss compensation for any victims under any circumstances," he told the Commons. "I was in the room when the minister of health from British Columbia said compensation for nobody."

The tongue-lashing seemed to work. After a lengthy conference call on Friday afternoon, provincial health ministers agreed that they would, in the words of Saskatchewan Health Minister Clay Serby, "continue to support our agreement" and would not call for extending the compensation package. Quebec, although remaining a signatory to the deal, still wants to extend compensation to those infected before 1986. As for those who contracted the disease pre-1986, the provincial ministers agreed that they would have to be content with enriched benefits and improvements in the existing health-care service.

The same day, his government reaffirmed that it would stick with the original package, Harris still managed to lob a grenade in Ottawa's direction. The Ontario premier announced that he would join victims in a lawsuit against the federal government to get compensation for all those infected. "I'm fed up with a federal government that's shirking its responsibility," Harris said at an auto-plant photo op near Toronto—also attended by Chretien.

The hepatitis C war, in other words, is far from over. At the very least, last week's events showed that peace in the federal-provincial battles that color the Canadian federation remains little more than a fond wish. A dejected Rock, who has always been portrayed as one of the Chretien ministers prepared to work with, rather than against, the provinces, told *Maclean's* that the experience has been "discouraging" (page 20). Added Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Stephane Dion: "It's necessary that the provinces treat the federal government with respect if they expect to be treated in that way."

And respect for the Liberals on this issue is in short supply these days. One of the main reasons: the success of the Reform party, which has been busy trotting out hepatitis C sufferers in the House of Commons visitors gallery and pummelling Rock during Question Period. The upshot is an ironic role reversal. Reform, a party that has always labored against a reputation for lacking compassion, has emerged as the primary defender of hepatitis C victims in the process managing to torment Rock, the darling of left-leaning "social liberals." Admits a high-ranking Rock aide: "Reform has been masterful."



TIM KROCHAK/PRESS

Victim Brian Baskin (right) confronts Deputy Prime Minister Herb Gray: outrage

A case in point: the way the party continues to hammer away on the question of just how many hepatitis C sufferers would have to be compensated if the deal covered those infected before 1986. "For weeks, the health minister has been exaggerating the number of hep C victims who were infected before 1986," said Reform MP Reed Elley in one fiery Question Period exchange. "He does this to scare Canadians, to make them think we had to throw these sick people out of the compensation lifeboat." In fact, in an interview late last week with *Maclean's*, Dr. Sam Lee, president of the Canadian Society for the Study of the Liver, argued that the number of those needing compensation may not be as great as official Ottawa believes and suggested a plan for stipends, instead of lump sums (page 18).

Rock says the fight is all about principles, not accounting. "Ultimately, it is not an issue of numbers," he said. "Whether there are 10 people, the issue is the same." He insists the point is not to save money, but to stick to the guiding tenet that the government should compensate people for a breakdown in a publicly regulated blood system—not simply in response to sympathy for the victims of a health crisis. His point, repeated doggedly throughout the debate, is that to compensate everyone would open the floodgates of demands for cash payments every time injury or disease unexpectedly strikes a portion of the population.

If Rock can weather this storm, he might seem due for a break in the clouds. But blue skies appear to be nowhere in sight. Later this month, he must table his department's newest attempt at anti-tobacco regulations to cover everything from cigarette packaging to the thorny issue of tobacco company advertising at sports and entertainment events. And *Maclean's* has learned that Rock has also begun discussions with provincial health ministers about launching a legal action to claim damages from the big tobacco companies, a measure similar to the $500-billion case that the Clinton administration is trying to bring against tobacco companies in the United States. That could pit him against MPs from Montreal, where the tobacco companies enjoy strong support. Rock also faces opposition from several provinces for his plan for a national home-care system. "The next 18 months," concludes a senior aide, "are critical to his future."

Rock's future was the subject of heated discussion in official Ottawa, remote as it seemed to those fighting for compensation for years of botched handling of blood policies. Controversy has been Rock's burden and blessing from the moment he was catapulted into cabinet as justice minister and attorney general in 1993. During his tenure, he was tarnished by the justice department's investigation into allegations of financial misconduct in the 1988 Air Canada purchase of Airbus jets. That resulted in a $50-million lawsuit by Brian Mulroney and a settlement early last year in which the government agreed to pay $1 million to cover the former prime minister's legal costs. And some Liberals still have not forgotten how Rock's gun-

BLOOD OF IRELAND

Tainted blood. Angry victims. Denial of liability. A government-appointed inquiry. A report blaming negligence in the blood distribution system. Compensation claims. Court cases. It all sounds like the Canadian experience, but it is the story of Ireland, where the equivalent of the Red Cross, the Blood Transfusion Service Board, battled long and hard before finally accepting responsibility for infecting hundreds of Irish men and women with hepatitis C. Ireland's scandal broke in early 1994, prompting the Fine Gael government of then-Prime Minister John Bruton to appoint a retired judge, Thomas Finlay, to investigate. In a damning 1997 report, Finlay accused the transfusion board of negligence in allowing hepatitis C to be transmitted to hemophiliacs, major recipients of transfusions, and expectant mothers using a blood product known as anti-D.

Rather than offering a single package, as in Canada, the government established a compensation tribunal, which, since 1996, has heard 400 of the 1,400 claims registered to date. In the biggest settlement so far, it awarded just over $2 million to a hemophiliac in December. The government has placed no time restriction on claims—even though the Irish blood supply has been screened for hepatitis C since 1991. In all, it is estimated that compensation awards will top $500 million—for an average of more than $350,000 per claimant.

Although the tribunal is a quicker, less confrontational and less stressful route, two victims have chosen another—exercising their right to appeal directly to Ireland's High Court. One is Mary Quinlan, a 41-year-old mother of eight from Carlow, 80 km south of Dublin. Infected from anti-D—given to prevent a blood incompatibility disorder that can produce so-called blue babies—she settled out of court last year for an estimated $1 million or more. The other was a Donegal woman, Brigid McCole, who died in October, 1996, a week before her case was due to reach the court. For some, the blood scandal—in Ireland as in Canada—has a devastating finality.

MICHAEL KEANE in Dublin

A TAINTED HISTORY

Infection and compensation: the key dates

1971: Test for hepatitis B in blood introduced in Canada. Red Cross discontinues collecting blood from prisons, where hepatitis rates are higher than in general population.

1974: First cases noted of transfusion transmission of what was then called non-A, non-B hepatitis (most of which would eventually be identified as hepatitis C).

1978: American Red Cross official informs Canadian Red Cross that non-A, non-B hepatitis is present in four to nine per cent of blood in several centres.

1981: Canadian Red Cross rejects "surrogate" tests (meaning testing not for a condition itself but for indicators generally associated with it) being developed for non-A, non-B hepatitis in blood. It cites controversy over their reliability and the lack of Canadian data, but no Canadian studies are undertaken.

1983: First compulsory reporting of non-A, non-B hepatitis across Canada identifies 134 cases.

1985: Canadian Red Cross starts screening blood for HIV, the AIDS virus.

1986: U.S. blood banking organizations start surrogate testing for non-A, non-B hepatitis based on research indicating it can drastically reduce the incidence of transfusion transmission. Canadian Red Cross remains unconvinced, estimating surrogate testing would prevent only a small number of cases, at a cost of up to $20 million in the first year.

1989: Hepatitis C virus identified, allowing scientists to test blood directly for its antibody. Most of Western Europe starts direct testing. On compassionate grounds, Ottawa awards $30,000 a year for four years to the 1,200 people affected with HIV through the blood supply. The program is later extended by provinces to provide the same amount annually for life.



Krever: no-fault compensation for 'all blood-injured persons'

1990: Canadian Red Cross (and U.S. organizations) start direct screening for hepatitis C virus. But unscreened plasma in blood products still reaches some patients, possibly for as long as two years.

1993: Federal government appoints Ontario appellate court Justice Horace Krever to investigate the contamination of the public blood supply in the 1980s.

1996: First of what now total seven major class action or group action lawsuits are launched across Canada, the most ambitious seeking $3.8 billion in compensation for hepatitis C sufferers.

Nov. 21, 1997: Krever releases his report, slamming the Red Cross and governments for ignoring warnings and acting irresponsibly as HIV and hepatitis C transmissions continued. He calls for prompt no-fault compensation for "all blood-injured persons." Krever concludes that 85 per cent of the approximately 28,600 hepatitis C infections from the blood supply from 1986 to 1990 could have been avoided.

Feb. 12, 1998: The RCMP launches a criminal investigation into the tainted blood scandal.

March 27: Federal Health Minister Allan Rock and his provincial counterparts announce a compensation package of $1.1 billion ($800 million from Ottawa, $300 million from the provinces), available only to those infected between 1986 and 1990, when screening could have been in place. Details of individuals' compensation are still to be worked out.

April 28: Invoking strict party discipline, the Liberal government defeats a Reform party motion calling for compensation for everyone who got the disease from tainted blood regardless of when the infection occurred. "The file is closed," declares Rock.

May 1: Amid hints of second thoughts on the part of several provincial governments, Saskatchewan Health Minister Clay Serby insists they all still support the March 27 deal. "We are not calling on Ottawa to extend the compensation package," says Serby after consulting fellow ministers. But in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec—and in the opposition ranks in Ottawa—politicians continue to press Rock to include all the victims of tainted blood.

control bill cost their party rural seats in last year's federal election

Rock's advisers were relieved to see him head for the health portfolio and a clean slate for the start of the Chrétien government's second term. Health, after all, seemed about to become the government's central focus in the post-deficit era. What better position for Rock to portray himself as the only viable candidate from the Liberal left capable of challenging Finance Minister Paul Martin, the right-of-centre heir apparent, to become leader when Chrétien goes?

Now, though, insiders are wondering how severely Rock has been hurt by the hepatitis C controversy. The argument that he has fumbled the file cannot be dismissed. Some of the criticism that the government was abandoning thousands of Canadians might have been blunted if he had negotiated to give the pre-1986 group free drugs, early access to disability insurance or other measures short of cash payments. The Liberal back-rooms are full of second-guessers, who maintain that Rock should have pinned the blame for the limited deal on the provinces from the outset. After all, the provinces agreed to throw just $300 million into the package, compared with the federal government's $800 million. And when provincial governments broke ranks last week, federal Liberals were even more inclined to wonder if Rock should have claimed the high ground for Ottawa earlier—and louder.

But few are ready to write Rock's political obituary just yet. "If the leadership race were being held tomorrow, this would hurt him," stresses one high-ranking Liberal strategist with ties to Martin. "A couple of years from now—well, the jury is very much out." So far, party strategists say there have been few calls and letters to ordinary MPs on the issue—unlike, for example, the phone and fax campaign over the gun-control legislation that worried the Liberal caucus and plagued Rock.

Some Liberals even think Rock can emerge stronger than ever from the latest controversy. Many acknowledge that any deal short of compensation for all hepatitis C sufferers was going to be roundly criticized anyway. But Rock's single-handed defence of the deal during Question Period has converted some of the doubters who felt he lacked the toughness necessary to lead. And his currency remains strong as ever among social liberals who say he would have offered more to hepatitis C sufferers had the Liberal cabinet not balked at upping the federal ante. "What most people who are supportive of Allan are saying now is that he just has to weather this storm and he'll be all right," notes one party strategist.

Maybe better than all right. By the end of last week, Chrétien, after keeping mostly silent on the issue, was rising in the House to defend Rock, all but confirming that the Prime Minister appreciated his minister's good soldier routine. Will that translate into funding for a major home-care initiative? Too early to say, perhaps. For now, Rock and his fellow Liberals only want to get past the hepatitis C issue. And after last week's raucous events, that day still looked far away.

With JOHN GEDDES and BRUCE WALLACE in Ottawa

QUESTIONING THE NUMBERS

Behind the political uproar over hepatitis C and tainted blood is a numbers game that just about nobody wants to play: how many people were infected with the virus, and how many of them will get so sick they will need compensation? Just asking can seem callous to those who are suffering—which leaves many experts wary about wading into the debate. Dr. Sam Lee, president of the Canadian Society for the Study of the Liver, says far fewer of those infected with hepatitis C are doomed to become gravely ill than is now widely thought. But he is worried about how his own patients would react to hearing him advocate a go-slow approach to awarding compensation. "From their perspective," Lee told *Maclean's*, "I'm a rich doctor saying some poor patient doesn't deserve compensation. How's that going to play?"



MIKE PINDER FOR MACLEAN'S

Haché: the government won the vote but lost the public relations battle

Lee says the best estimate is that out of about 300,000 Canadians currently infected with hepatitis C, some 20,000 to 60,000 could have contracted the virus from tainted blood. But the federal government's Laboratory Centre for Disease Control puts the number considerably higher—estimating that up to 82,000 Canadians were infected through the blood system. The centre's deputy director general, Dr. Paul Gully, said that includes 22,000 infected from 1986 to 1990, the period for which the government wants to pay compensation, and up to 60,000 before then.

Details of the research that came up with those numbers will be made public "soon," according to federal officials. But that explanation will probably be greeted skeptically by hepatitis C activists. "There is no question that the claim of 60,000 victims [infected before 1986] is way inflated," said Jeremy Beaty, president of the Hepatitis C Society of Canada, who accuses Ottawa of pumping up the figure to suggest that opening up the compensation package would be hugely expensive. He estimates, based on preliminary results of surveys of blood transfusion recipients in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, that only 10,000 to 15,000 victims who contracted the virus before 1986 remain alive and would be eligible for compensation if Ottawa opened the package up.

While experts argue over the total number of Canadians infected, they agree that many of those who carry the virus will probably not become seriously ill as a result. "It doesn't cause symptoms in the vast majority of people," Lee says. "There's no way they'd know they have it unless they went for a specific blood test." For a minority, though, the prospects are grim. 20 years after being infected, 20 per cent develop cirrhosis of the liver. One to five percent are expected to get liver cancer. Many others will have their energy sapped by the virus. But the good news is that drug treatment now available can wipe out an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of hepatitis C cases caught before liver disease sets in. And, Lee says, new drug therapies now being developed, which aim to block the activity of the enzymes that allow the virus to spread, show promise of curing many more patients within the next few years.

With many hepatitis C victims hopeful of a cure and many more unlikely to get seriously ill, governments are not sure what proportion will need compensation. A plan for allocating the $1.1 billion that Ottawa and the provinces have promised to ante up will be worked out in negotiations with hepatitis C groups and ultimately ratified by a judge. Lee favors compensating only those patients who develop serious symptoms. "I would pay them a stipend, not a lump sum, with the idea that this would stop if better therapy became available and their disease was eradicated." As for how that suggestion might be received, Lee is uneasy. "I had a patient in my clinic the other day literally shaking with rage about the fact that she was excluded from compensation," he said. "Some of these people are suffering—and almost all of them are angry."

JOHN GEDDES *in Ottawa*



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SPECIAL REPORT

'We have nothing to lose'

Victims of hepatitis C vow to fight on

Every so often, Kim and Neil Van Dusen's youngest daughter, five-year-old Emileigh, trundles into the dining room of their Sydney, N.S., home and, with her blue eyes downcast, poses a question many youngsters ask: "Daddy, are you going to die?" In this case, the fact that her father has hepatitis C makes the question more wrenching. Neil, a 39-year-old hemophiliac who contracted the potentially fatal disease through blood transfusions, is already showing signs of cirrhosis, a condition that could eventually lead to liver cancer if he fails to find a transplant organ. He suffers from constant fatigue, headaches, abdominal pain and insomnia. Still, for the sake of Emileigh and the couple's three other children, he does his best to sound hopeful. "We tell them that maybe somebody somewhere will find a cure or a treatment that will help," says Neil, who left his job at Canada Post three years ago because of the illness. "But, honestly, how do you answer something like that?"

For the thousands of Canadians with hepatitis C, the questions never stop. But the search for answers often breeds an emotional agony that rivals their physical torment. The victims' public fight for justice from the federal and provincial governments has been equally painful. "What the government is doing to us is unforgivable," says Dave Smith, 47, a hepatitis C sufferer from Victoria, B.C., who traces his case to an emergency operation he underwent in 1973 following a car accident. "It's a slap in the face."

The battle erupted into anger last week when Liberal members of Parliament voted the party line on a controversial $1.1-billion federal-provincial compensation package aimed only at victims infected by tainted blood between 1986 and 1990. About 100 sufferers, many visibly weakened by the disease, marched on Parliament Hill to protest the decision. Opposition from provincial legislatures offered a brief flash of hope, only to be dashed later when most provincial health ministers appeared to fall in line after a cross-country conference call. But the victims, both those covered by the package and those excluded, vowed to continue their crusade. "We have never given up," said Jeremy Beaty, the 61-year-old president of the Hepatitis C Society of Canada and a former executive with high-tech giant Hewlett-Packard Canada Ltd. "This will never go away as long as the last one of us is alive, and that's what the government has to contend with."

Victims of the disease say Ottawa is more concerned with limiting compensation than genuinely helping those in need. Critics argue that the government has wildly inflated its estimate of the number of hepatitis C sufferers to boost the expected cost of the package and turn the public against the victims. At the same time, by restricting the eligibility period, Ottawa is deliberately trying to divide the hepatitis C community, the sufferers charge. Many say the strategy just won't work. "I'll just keep on fighting until everyone gets compensation," says Joey Haché, 15, of Russell, Ont., who contracted the virus in one of the frequent transfusions he needs to treat a rare blood disease.


Lau: in her view, the Prime Minister is 'a total hypocrite'

Most of the blame, the victims say, rests squarely with Health Minister Allan Rock—once considered a champion of the hepatitis C cause—and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Chrétien's position on the issue stands in sharp contrast to his support for human rights in Cuba, they charge. "The man is a total hypocrite," says Gayle Lau, a Toronto woman who was given contaminated blood during an operation in 1987. Rock, in turn, has resorted to scare tactics, saying a huge settlement could ruin Canada's health-care system. Says Lau: "I can't believe he'd be so cold."

No matter what shape the compensation ultimately takes, it will never restore the quality of life that hepatitis C victims enjoyed before they got sick. Lau says the disease has robbed her of her dreams and her dignity. At 32, "I should be getting a good, exciting job and doing exciting things," she says. "But that's not part of my life anymore." Unable to work for months at a time, she survives on a meagre provincial disability pension that leaves her with only $330 a month after rent. It has been three years since she bought new clothing. And she suffers from oppressive fatigue and rheumatoid arthritis—common to hepatitis C victims. "I'm living this horrible hand-to-mouth existence," she adds. "I don't know how long I can last like this."

Blessed with a generous public-service disability pension, Van Dusen is less concerned about money. For him, the disease's heaviest toll has been on his family life. A father who once delighted in playing with his children for hours, he says he now "feels spent" after walking around the block. But Van Dusen says the hardships have only strengthened the resolve of hepatitis C sufferers to win a just settlement. "The government and the Red Cross have already taken away all our dignity and destroyed our lives," he says. "We have nothing to lose anymore." So the fight will go on—to the end.

JOHN SCHOFIELD

Rock stands his ground

Federal Health Minister Allan Rock has been on the firing line over the compensation package for those who contracted hepatitis C through tainted blood between 1986 and 1990. Late last week, Rock, who also endured controversy over the Airbus affair during his earlier tenure as justice minister, spoke to Maclean's *Ottawa Correspondent John DeMont about the federal-provincial offer. Excerpts from that interview:*



Rock: *'If you offer it to everybody who got sick, then where do you stop?'*

Maclean's: *Could you elaborate on the positions of the provinces during the negotiations for the compensation package?*

Rock: From the beginning, the provincial ministers as a group took the position that we should not go down the road of compensation at all because of where it would lead. Some spoke about waiting lists for surgery in their provinces. Others spoke about problems they have with children's aid and compensation for their problems. Others talked about simply not being liable. But in the last days, Ontario and British Columbia said, 'Oh well, not only should we do what is in this agreement—but Ottawa should also go beyond 1986.' My reason for raising this is to point out the irony and the contradiction of people who had said no compensation for anybody because of the implications of it on their budgets.

Maclean's: *What does the uproar say about the whole question of federal-provincial relations?*

Rock: This particular incident is discouraging. I know that when the provinces speak to us they ask us, 'Don't act unilaterally. Don't take us by surprise. Speak to us in advance of taking positions and remember we're in this together.' And yet this week, after the ministers in both Ontario and Quebec reaffirmed the agreement publicly, they reversed their position [after a conference call at week's end, all provinces, with the exception of Quebec, subsequently expressed support for the package].

Maclean's: *Was there ever a moment when you felt there should be full compensation?*

Rock: In the summer of last year when we started into this file, I don't think I knew enough about the history to draw distinctions and categories. I was aware there were people who were infected by reason of blood and wanted to look into it and learn more—we wanted to open a dialogue. Over the whole period, I have looked for what is the role of government. One role, both for provinces and the federal government, is to make sure we keep a good strong health-care system providing services people with hepatitis C need. Another role of government is responsibility—if someone got harmed because of someone not doing their job, then to face up to that. The more I examined these different concepts, I came to the conclusion that governments can help in different ways.

Maclean's: *How will the $1.1-billion package be parcelled out?*

Rock: There are discussions going on between lawyers at the moment and I think it's best to leave it to them. I don't think we see the process as something which is dividing the number of dollars. It's more of an idea that it will be a fund available for those who have problems with their health affecting their income.

The minister of health says the package is fair

Maclean's: *Are you surprised the issue has stayed alive for so long?*

Rock: I think it's fair to say that all the ministers of health expected that it was going to be a controversial decision and a difficult period. It's remained prominent for a number of reasons over the last few weeks. The opposition has focused on this and this alone. We have a situation where all the opposition parties take the same position on the same issue. It doesn't often happen. We expected it to be controversial and difficult. But that's why we took so much time coming to the conclusion.

Maclean's: *You seem to attract controversy.*

Rock: Justice and health are two of the most difficult and controversial portfolios—difficult issues that touch people's lives, about which people can feel strongly and emotionally. I think it's impossible to deal with the agenda in either department without touching on controversy. Health is a portfolio that has a lot of items on the agenda that are important to people.

Maclean's: *What will the fallout be from this roller-coaster week?*

Rock: The opposition parties are doing what they're doing for political purposes. I find that when I speak to people and I explain why we are offering compensation to some and not others, they understand. When I explain that some people are getting compensation because they got sick because somebody didn't do their job, they can accept it to an extent. But if you offer it to everybody who got sick, then where do you stop? Medicare is not there to pay those people but to treat them. That's what we want to do. I also can tell you it was quite clear that one side is easier to argue than the other. But it doesn't mean it's the more appropriate decision. It doesn't mean it's the right decision or the correct decision. □





BRYNE STANLEY FOR MACLEAN'S

Delgado and the St. Roch: a plan to save the vessel by re-enacting her historic voyage

Cutbacks endanger the proud St. Roch

emblematic of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. In addition to delivering supplies to scattered RCMP detachments, the ship carried mail, ferried Inuit from place to place, transported the sick to hospital and served as a mobile police detachment. Those decades of service appeared finally to be repaid with honorable retirement when the vessel was hauled ashore and turned into a museum, 40 years ago last month.

But retirement has proven hazardous. In 1995, Parks Canada, which had maintained the vessel for more than 20 years, cut her loose—a victim of Ottawa's battle against the deficit. At the end of last year, 24 months of temporary funding from Ottawa and the city of Vancouver (which holds legal title to the ship) also came to an end, leaving the St. Roch's future in doubt. But now a new plan has surfaced to save the sturdy vessel—a high-profile re-enactment of her historic voyage. If the maritime museum—whose staff cares for the ship—has its way, the RCMP will provide a modern patrol boat for the project in two years' time. Museum executive director James Delgado hopes the venture will attract enough corporate sponsors to raise the millions of dollars he says are needed to guarantee the St. Roch's future.

The rigors of her past voyages seem remote in the ship's present home. She dwells now under an A-frame shelter, her grey paint and black trim looking fresh, her accommodations cluttered with the accoutrements of the voyage, as though the crew has just stepped off on patrol. In the galley are bottles of lime cordial (to stave off scurvy) and packages of Sunlight soap (which had a second use, to seal the primitive bottle-bombs Larsen fabricated to blast through ice-jams). In a tiny lounge, books and magazines (including the March 1, 1943, issue of *Maclean's*) lie ready to relieve the tedium of the arctic winter. But despite the appearance of good repair, the 70-year-old ship is failing. Dry rot has attacked her stern. The wear-and-tear of 88,000 visitors a year requires expensive repairs. "We've funded the St. Roch as best we can," says Delgado. "But we're about at the end of our rope."

The American-born Delgado, however, has some ideas about where to find more rope. One, already under way, is to sell ownership of one-inch squares of a panoramic portrait of the Arctic donated by artist Ken Kirkby, to raise a hoped-for $2.6 million (the 45-m-long painting itself would eventually provide a fitting backdrop for the St. Roch). More daring is Delgado's scheme to re-enact the St. Roch's famous voyage. The idea is to send one of the high-speed aluminum catamarans the RCMP now uses for coastal patrols through the Northwest Passage in the summer of 2000, largely following Larsen's 1940-1942 course.

At top speeds of more than 30 knots, the contemporary vessel should be able to make the passage in less than a month, says Delgado. He hopes Canadian corporations will be willing to pay a total of $5 million to be associated with the venture. Of that, $1 million would be spent to cover costs, another $1 million would go towards an RCMP charity. The remaining $3 million would be used to preserve the St. Roch.

Shoals lie ahead for the undertaking. The RCMP remains cautious, for one thing. "Is this truly a re-enactment?" wonders RCMP Insp. Don Sagle, responsible for marine operations in British Columbia, "or is it a commercial enterprise utilizing RCMP resources?" If it appears to be the latter, he hints, the force may pull out. A more practical concern is whether a lightly built catamaran could safely navigate seas prone to ice. And Delgado faces a more immediate challenge: later this month, Vancouver city council will weigh the museum's request that it continue funding the St. Roch for two more years, until proceeds from a re-enactment begin to flow into a trust fund for the ship. "Without their involvement," Delgado says, "we can't afford to keep the vessel."

Delgado argues passionately that the goal of preserving the St. Roch is worth the effort. "This boat, small and frail, with just a few people on board, took the worst that the world could dish out in the most gruelling environment imaginable, and survived," he says. "And they didn't just hang on, they did amazing things. They went places no one else had gone. They lived an adventure. The ship is an inspiration. It tells anybody, young or old, 'You can do it.'"

That may explain why the sturdy little ship, in her dry dock overlooking English Bay, seems so untouched by the shadow hanging over her future. Municipal politics and corporate image-marketing can surely hold no greater terrors than the grinding ice of the Arctic. Asked what he will remember about the St. Roch, Anthony Brum answers, "She didn't sink." No. With luck and a little help, she never will. □

A journey for sovereignty

Built in Vancouver of native Douglas fir and iron-hard Australian gumwood, the St. Roch was launched in 1928 and went immediately into regular RCMP service in the western Arctic. But in early 1940, its commander, Sgt. Henry Larsen, received new orders. "Canada was at war," he recalled afterwards, "and the government realized the need to demonstrate sovereignty over the Arctic Islands." So Larsen was sent to make the first Canadian crossing of the Northwest Passage, matching the 1903-1906 feat of Norwegian Roald Amundsen. There was a second, secret assignment as well: to search for hidden German radio bases in the Arctic, believed to have been established to relay orders to Nazi submarine packs in the North Atlantic. (None were found.)

With the St. Roch able to find clear passage through pack ice only during August and September, the gruelling voyage took more than two years. The 45-m schooner, powered by sails and an auxiliary engine, was far from a luxury liner. She had a stomach-churning roll in heavy seas, a side-effect of her round hull—designed to help her survive the ice. Even so, pack ice frequently threatened to crush her, as Larsen wrote in his log, "like a nut." The ship and her 10-man RCMP crew spent two long arctic winters trapped in ice (off Victoria Island one year, the next off Boothia Peninsula). The ship reached Halifax at last on Oct. 11, 1942. "There was no celebration," recalls Patrick Hunt, one of two surviving crew members from the historic passage. "There was nobody waiting at the dock, nobody writing newspaper articles. It wasn't important, with so many guys losing their lives over in Europe." It was a quintessentially Canadian reception for the ship that staked Canada's first real claim to the Far North.

C.W.

CANADA FOCUS B.C.

Salvaging history

BY CHRIS WOOD

A small horde of second- and third-graders swarms down onto the blood-red deck like so many giggling pirates. But the "blood" on the deck is really red-oxide paint. And the children—from Parkcrest Elementary School in Burnaby, B.C.—have come to Vancouver to board and briefly take possession of a uniquely tangible heritage. They are scrambling over the former RCMP Arctic patrol vessel St. Roch, now preserved in the building that also houses the Vancouver Maritime Museum, overlooking English Bay. Eyes widen at a stuffed walrus lying on the foredeck, supposedly food for several huskies—also stuffed—perched on drums of spare fuel. Braver children climb eight feet up a vertical ladder to stand behind the big wooden ship's wheel. Anthony Brum, 8, and his friend Alex D'Angelo, 9, agree that the idea of spending the winter on the St. Roch, in arctic ice, is "scary." Alex adds: "I'd want an axe in my hand the whole time. You'd never know what might happen next."

That was certainly true enough when the St. Roch was afloat. In 1942, at the end of a hazardous 28-month voyage under the command of Sgt. Henry Larsen, the little wooden ship became only the second vessel in history to navigate the Northwest Passage across the top of Canada, and the first to do so from west to east. (Roald Amundsen's Gjöa had made the only other passage, east-to-west, nearly 40 years earlier.) The St. Roch did not return for two years, when a more powerful engine got it back through across the Arctic in only 86 days. In 1950, after sailing from Vancouver to Halifax again—this time via the Panama Canal—the St. Roch became the first ship to circumnavigate North America.

Perhaps more importantly, for two decades the St. Roch was

Passionate populist

New Brunswick Liberals pick a new premier

Long before New Brunswick Liberal cabinet minister Camille Theriault formally announced his bid for his party's—and the province's—top job on Jan. 26, his leadership ambitions were a badly kept secret. During Frank McKenna's final years in office, the politically wily Theriault quietly lobbied his fellow Liberals in an attempt to position himself as the heir apparent. It was an effort that helped him secure an early—and enduring—lead among the 4,000 delegates who attended last weekend's leadership convention in Saint John. But it also served to rankle many Liberals, who felt that Theriault was just a little too eager to replace the man who had led the party to three lopsided majority governments since 1987. Following his victory over fellow cabinet ministers Bernard Richard and Greg Byrne, Theriault, who will become New Brunswick's 29th premier, made a point of reaching out to his two opponents, asking them to "relentlessly voice your opinions to tell me my weaknesses, perceived or real, so that I may be a better leader."

Soothing some raw nerves within his own party is just one of the challenges facing Theriault as he lays the groundwork for a provincial election that must be held by the year 2000. Of the three leadership candidates, Theriault, 43, was the one most closely associated with the McKenna era. First elected in 1987, he served in several cabinet portfolios, including the critical economic development ministry. As a result, he is linked in the public mind with the major initiatives of the past decade, including the slashing of government services in a successful bid to eliminate a $370-million deficit. Such associations have their benefits: as the party's emotional farewell to McKenna on Friday night reinforced, the former premier remains a respected figure who is widely credited with changing his province's image from an economic backwater. But there is also growing public fatigue with government cutbacks—reflected in the fact that support for the Liberals among decided voters has dropped by a stunning 30 percentage points in the last 18 months.

Theriault faces some immediate political headaches. Among them is the fallout from an April 22 ruling by the New Brunswick Court of Appeal that native loggers have no right to harvest or sell timber from Crown lands. The ruling overturned a lower court decision last October that said 18th-century treaties gave native people first right to Crown lands. While it is likely that the case will be referred to the Supreme Court of Canada, a tense—and potentially violent—standoff persists. Many native loggers, who have prospered since the October ruling, are vowing to keep cutting—even if it means risking jail time. The province, meanwhile, faces increasing pressure from the forestry industry and non-native loggers to resolve the impasse.

During the leadership race, all three candidates were conspicuously silent on the issue. On Saturday though, Theriault held out an olive branch, telling the delegates that "the government I lead will work together with the native people. We will do this in a spirit of mutual respect and dignity."

As Theriault's often fiery convention speeches again demonstrated, the fluently bilingual Acadian is a passionate campaigner with a populist touch, attributes that may be traced back to his upbringing as part of a political family in an impoverished area of rural New Brunswick. His father, Norbert, ran a fish business and general store in the small town of Baie-Sainte-Anne; he was also a cabinet minister in Louis Robichaud's reform-minded Liberal government of the 1960s and went on to serve in the Senate. Theriault, who used to work after school at his father's store, caught a firsthand glimpse of how local fishermen struggled to support their families. "You realize that there are always people who need assistance," he told *Maclean's*. "It's where I learned the importance of having a good social safety net."

In fact, Theriault describes himself as a "left-of-centre Liberal," and says he was not always comfortable with the budget-cutting of the McKenna era. But he makes no apologies for the active role he played during those years. "Frank was a visionary," he says. "He took the party to the right because we had to do that, and every province in Canada followed us. Now, we are in a position to reinvest in our most important resource—our people."

Theriault's success in delivering that message will determine whether he remains premier after the next provincial election. It is far from a lost cause, despite the Liberals' recent free fall in the public opinion polls, the latest survey from Halifax-based Corporate Research Associates, released in March, gave the party 43 per cent support among decided voters, compared with 30 per cent for the Conservatives and 20 per cent for the NDP. The Liberals also hold a commanding 47 seats in the legislature, as compared with seven for the Tories and one for the NDP. Before the party faithful in Saint John, Theriault exuded unbounded confidence in the Liberals' fortunes. Promising to act quickly on jobs, health care and education, he told the opposition parties, "Watch us—and then watch out." All New Brunswickers, in fact, will be watching closely to see if the new premier's actions live up to his rhetoric.

BRIAN BERGMAN *in Saint John*



A victorious Theriault (right) chats with the vanquished Richard: 'tell me my weaknesses'

Bruce Wallace



Connecting with Castro

Events of the past decade have left us addicted to seeing history made at high speed: walls must fall overnight, wars must be fought and won in mere weeks, genocides slip past in a blur on the evening news. That's a tough environment in which to conduct old-style diplomacy—the nudge-here, prod-there approach that may or may not lead to some measurable change down the road. No surprise, then, at the pundits' dismissive reaction towards Jean Chrétien's overture to Fidel Castro last week. Unable to return with a planeload of political prisoners, unable to convince Castro to shave his beard, proclaim democracy and discover the merits of the market, Chrétien was at the mercy of critics impatient to pronounce his trip to Havana a bust.

How discouraging for anyone willing to take a crack at breaking away from the name-calling that passes for policy both inside Cuba and out. Domestic political concerns press leaders to stick stubbornly to old policies that perpetuate the deadlock. Washington's trade embargo offers Castro an excuse at home for Cuba's miserable living conditions. No American politician wants trouble from the powerful Cuban-American bloc of voters centred in Florida by changing the Cold War hard line on Castro. European countries, as usual, can't agree on a policy or, like the British, refuse to cross Washington over something as insignificant as Cuba for fear of damaging the Anglo-American "special relationship."

> Jean Chrétien was at the mercy of critics impatient to pronounce his trip to Havana a bust

Chrétien could also have chosen to play exclusively to the home audience. He could have landed in Havana, scolded Castro on his horrible human rights record, and soaked up applause for a dramatic gesture putting a tyrant in his place. And not moved the yardsticks an inch. Instead, he met with Cuban dissidents and church leaders who thanked him for coming. Since they are the ones who must live under Castro's thumb, their opinion should count for more than that of Canadian editorial writers who are unlikely to experience Cuban life except as tourists. Their argument that Chrétien's presence somehow legitimized Castro's slurs on the United States during his welcoming speech (the Cuban leader likened the U.S. embargo to the Holocaust) is simply silly. Even the Clinton administration dismissed Castro's speech as buffoonery.

Of course, it is far easier to write off renegade states than to engage in the hard slogging of trying to change them. And the West's moral disgust is selectively applied. When leaders of the entire Western Hemisphere (minus Cuba) gathered last month in Santiago, Chile, for a summit, the group photo included Colombian President Ernesto Samper, in whose country at least nine human rights activists have been murdered in the past year. The Commonwealth and la Francophonie both welcome despots and thieves (the so-called kleptocrats) to their glittering dinners. And two years ago, the most powerful leaders of the free world rushed to an emergency summit in Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, after suicide bombings threatened to kill the Middle East peace process. They were desperate to shore up the credibility of Yasser Arafat, who continues to be cited by the U.S. state department for human rights violations in Palestinian territories and Shimon Peres, the Israeli prime minister on whose watch Israeli security forces assassinated a violent political opponent. The family of nations, it must be remembered, is hardly run by a club of pacifists.

This does not excuse Castro, who is guilty not only of dumping political opponents into dank jail cells but of creating the desperate misery that drives many Cubans into prostitution simply to eat. But that suffering also begged for someone to take a first step to try to slow the slide towards the abyss. If Chrétien's engagement shows Cubans that not every country in the West is intent upon rubbing Cuba into dust, then it undermines Castro's great lie about the monolithic evil of the capitalist world. If Chrétien leaves Cubans with some hope that they do not have to wait for an old man to die before their lives might improve, and bolsters the spirits of those working to avoid having post-Castro Cuba slip into Russian-style criminality, then the baby step he took in Havana was far more valuable than one more finger-wagging lecture.

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Canada NOTES

WASTING MONEY

Federal Auditor General Denis Desautels reported that the department of national defence squanders funds buying the wrong equipment. Desautels examined six defence department projects, valued at $3.3 billion, and found half involved the purchase of inadequate equipment. For example, the military bought Griffon helicopters for $1.2 billion in 1992 to transport troops and equipment, even though the aircraft's lifting power is not sufficient for military purposes.

PEDDLING INFLUENCE

Former federal Liberal organizer Pierre Corbeil was fined $34,500 after pleading guilty to four counts of influence-peddling. The RCMP said that Corbeil tried last year to collect as much as $10,000 each from companies that had applied for job-creation grants from Ottawa's transitional jobs fund.

JAILING A KILLER

Gerald Robert Wilson, whose case became a flash point for aboriginal anger at the justice system, was sentenced to seven years in prison for killing his common-law wife with a shotgun. Wilson, 38, is white and his wife, Dorothy Martin, was aboriginal. She died of a shotgun blast to the head during a tussle over the weapon. Wilson, of The Pas, Man., was at first charged with minor weapons offences, prompting cries of racism and native demonstrations. Almost a year after the slaying, the charges were upgraded to second-degree murder. Wilson is the son of the town sheriff, who was criticized by the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry for not coming forward for years after he learned the identity of four suspects in the 1971 murder of Cree teenager Helen Betty Osborne.

WATER TORTURE TEST

Vancouver homeowners began testifying before a one-man commission into why thousands of B.C. residences, mostly condominiums built in the past 15 years, have sprung serious leaks. Former B.C. premier Dave Barrett heard testimony comparing the leaky-condo scandal to the Manitoba flood or the Quebec ice storm. But Barrett said those disasters were acts of God, and homeowners should not expect the same kind of government compensation, adding: "I don't think God was in the business of building condos."



Johnson (left) and Charest: the Liberals plug stability and jobs

Leader of the pack

Former federal Conservative leader Jean Charest, promising a stable political climate in which business would prosper, was acclaimed leader of the Quebec Liberal party. Replacing outgoing leader Daniel Johnson, who announced in March he would resign, Charest laid the blame for Quebec's stagnant economy squarely on Premier Lucien Bouchard. "This government is making us poorer," he told a Liberal rally attended by some 2,000 party faithful in the Quebec City suburb of Ste-Foy. "Collectively, and individually, Quebecers are poorer than when the Parti Quebecois was elected."

Charest, however, avoided specifics on constitutional matters. He said the Calgary declaration—in which the nine English-speaking provinces called for recognition of Quebec's "unique character" while maintaining that all provinces are equal—was a good starting point, but underscored the need for more talks. "Nobody ever pretended that it was the grand solution," Charest said. The next day, he dismissed Bouchard's attempt to intensify debate on the declaration. "It speaks very eloquently to his agenda," Charest said. "Mr. Bouchard, by raising this, clearly has an agenda focused on referendums and separation. Now people in Quebec will know my agenda is economy and jobs." Charest's popularity has carried the Liberals to new heights. One recent poll indicated that 50 per cent of voters would back the Liberals in an election, while 42 per cent would opt for the PQ.

JUSTICE

Refusing Zundel

The Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear an appeal by Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel, who was trying to circumvent a review of his application for Canadian citizenship. A native of Germany, Zundel applied for citizenship in 1993, but the Security Intelligence Review Committee wanted to assess whether he posed a national security risk. Zundel took issue with that, arguing in the Federal Court of Canada that the SIRC was biased against him because it had previously investigated the white supremacist group Heritage Front, to which Zundel belonged. (In its report on the Front, the committee branded Zundel a Holocaust denier, publisher of hate mail and member of the radical right.) Last November, the Federal Court of Appeal said the SIRC was acting within its mandate and had the authority to make a recommendation on Zundel. If Zundel still wants to apply for Canadian citizenship, he will first have to be screened by the SIRC.

More Canadian content

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission upset radio broadcasters with new guidelines that will raise Canadian music content to 35 per cent in January. Previously, radio stations could limit Canadian content to 30 per cent overall, and were allowed an even lower limit during prime time, making up the difference by playing Canadian music late at night. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters called the CRTC's new minimum an "onerous demand" because of a shortage of good Canadian material. But CRTC chairwoman Françoise Bertrand hinted that Canadian content requirements will continue to increase. "Thirty-five per cent, that's not a ceiling, it's a floor," Bertrand said.

The commission, however, will loosen limits on station ownership. In the past, a company could own only one AM and one FM station in a single market. Now, a single owner will be allowed up to three stations in smaller markets, and two on each band in markets with eight or more stations. But the CRTC did not attempt to curb U.S. shock jock Howard Stern, whose show airs in Montreal and Toronto. Complaints, Bertrand noted, have fallen since the stations started deleting offensive material with the help of a time-delayed broadcast. She said shows like Stern's could be dealt with when a station's licence comes up for renewal.

Jean and Fidel

How a pragmatist tried to sway an ideologue

ON ASSIGNMENT BRUCE WALLACE IN CUBA

There was not much time during Jean Chrétien's dash-in, dash-out visit to Cuba to get a long look at the physical and spiritual rubble of Fidel Castro's revolution. Havana is crumbling into Sarajevo-like destruction, though its cityscape of gorgeous colonial and Art Deco buildings suffers from neglect rather than bombardment. While some of Old Havana's beautiful columns and villas are being restored for the tourist trade, the rest of the city decays and collapses. Electricity and water supply are sporadic. Any man with American dollars to spend is accosted by an army of prostitutes desperate for money in a society where a doctor's pay tops out at $50 a month. After its 1959 revolution, Cuba became a one-industry economy. Its cash crop: supporting the Soviet Union's foreign machinations. The end of the Cold War effectively put Cuba out of business, and the aftermath is the misery so tragically visible on Havana's rutted streets.

If Castro is disillusioned that his utopian dream has sunk to these depths, he hides it well. His speech welcoming Chrétien on the tarmac outside a new Canadian-built airport terminal was a throwback to the days of Cold War tantrums, reminiscent of Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe on his desk at the United Nations. Castro called the 38-year-long U.S. economic blockade of his island "genocide," and argued that American leaders should be "taken before an international court to stand trial as war criminals." But Castro does not get many visiting prime ministers these days—there had not been a Western leader in Havana for 12 years. So he fawned over Chrétien, calling him a "man of peace, of irrevocable talent who understands the problems of Latin America." Canada, suggested Castro enigmatically as Chrétien's plane prepared to take off for home after the 41-hour visit, could be "the system of the future."

Few observers really expect the 71-year-old Castro to renounce his lifelong political beliefs and set Cuba free. He sees himself as the guardian of his revolution's ideals, although Chrétien maintained, in an interview with *Maclean's* after returning to Ottawa last week, that Castro "is changing." But progress, said the Prime Minister, must be measured "one step at a time." In that regard, Chrétien's working visit produced marginal gains: a Canadian insurance company received $13-million compensation for Cuban assets confiscated after the revolution, and the leaders agreed on modest exchange programs in health, sports and audiovisual productions.

The real shift Cuba watchers want to see is Castro relaxing his intolerance towards political dissent. Chrétien was criticized at home for not making a more forceful public appeal for human rights upon arrival when he was given the extraordinary opportunity to speak to Cubans on live television. But the Prime Minister insisted that he was aggressive on the subject during private meetings with Castro. "You get absolutely nowhere if you go down and try to tell them what to do," explained one senior Canadian official.

But private bull sessions with Castro usually require the visitor to listen rather than talk. So instead of allowing the Cuban president to launch into one of his legendary monologues, Chrétien said he jumped in as soon as the first meeting began, demanding Castro release political prisoners. Chrétien slipped a card to Castro with the names of four prominent dissidents now in Cuban jails. "You're getting to the toughest issues first," said the Cuban president, who was taken aback by the Prime Minister's assertiveness, according to Canadian officials. "We only have so much time." Chrétien replied. Castro was noncommittal on the fate of the four jailed Cubans, but he kept the card with the names on a table in front of him throughout the meeting. "I know these people," was his only direct remark on their cases. The Canadian analysis of whether Chrétien's intervention will bear results was a simple "wait and see."

But Chrétien's private pitch seemed to satisfy U.S. President Bill Clinton, who had urged the Prime Minister beforehand to raise the question of human rights with Castro. As long as Chrétien did so, said Clinton, then the Canadian approach of meeting with Castro "could serve our common goal." Clinton's refusal to criticize the Chrétien visit reflects the administration's own softening attitude towards Cuba in recent weeks, and Canadian officials had received indications from White House officials—though no surefire promises—that



Chrétien and Castro ride in from the airport: a sense of common purpose

'I think he is changing'

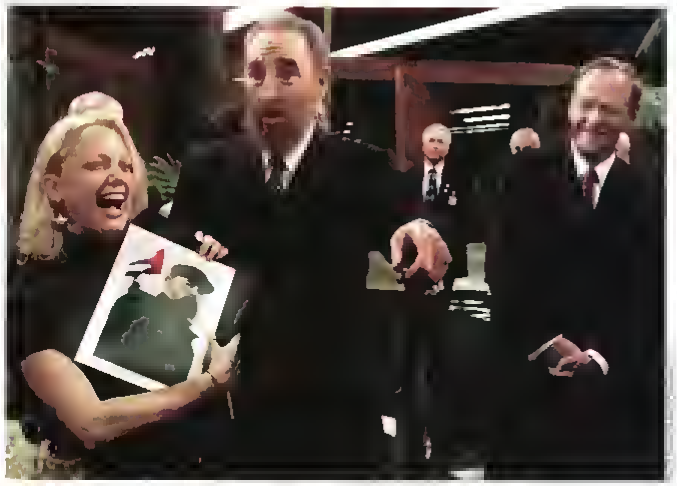
The day after returning from his historic visit to Havana, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien sat down with Maclean's *Ottawa Editor Bruce Wallace and reflected on his meetings with Cuban President Fidel Castro*

Maclean's *What went through your mind on the tarmac when Castro denounced the United States so harshly?*
Chrétien I was not very happy because the words were too strong. I told him that. It was a very tough speech. But I wasn't warned that he would use the occasion to make what, for Cuba, is a normal speech.
Maclean's *Why not respond?*
Chrétien Because I was satisfied that I was raising all the points I wanted to raise. What was important was to tell everybody there that change is coming and you'll have to adjust. He was in the past. I was in the present and the future.
Maclean's *When you learned your speech would be carried live on Cuban TV, why did you not use the opportunity, as the Pope did, to make a strong pitch for democracy directly to the Cuban people?*
Chrétien I made a strong speech. I was telling him: "Sir, adjust to the new reality." If you think that is mild, fine. I thought it was very clear, but it was done in a civilized way.
Maclean's *Do you really expect Castro to change? Or are we simply laying groundwork for a post-Castro Cuba?*
Chrétien I think he is changing. The fact that my speech was on the air is a big change, the fact that I met the Cardinal in public. But if people naïvely thought I would go there and train the leader of the opposition, it was too high an expectation. One step at a time.
Maclean's: *So change is possible while Castro is in power?*
Chrétien: Probably, yes. For some people it will never be enough. But if you do nothing, there will be an embargo that remains, and Castro and [U.S. Senator Jesse] Helms will make the same speeches. And who pays the price? The poor people in Cuba, the cousins of those people who are living in Miami and New Jersey. Give them a break. The boycott has not resolved anything.
Maclean's: *How did he react when you raised the issue of political prisoners?*
Chrétien: It was tough, the first 20 minutes. He was shocked. He does not accept the words "political prisoners." He says: "They are prisoners. Don't you have prisoners in Canada?" I had to say yes. But how many are *political* prisoners? He said they are condemned under the laws of the country. I said: "Yeah, but I have a good case on some of them because they have not been tried." He said: "Have you never had somebody in jail in Canada who has not had a trial for six months?" And I know that we have that once in a while. He told me the Pope gave him a list [of political prisoners] and a lot of the people on that list were not in jail any more and some were dead.
Maclean's: *Did the success of the land-mines treaty affect how you see Canada's role in international affairs?*
Chrétien: Oh yes. And I said he should sign [the treaty]. He said: "I cannot. I have an American base on my ground." He feels terrorized by the Americans. He's afraid that he will get it.
Maclean's: *But is that realistic?*
Chrétien: Well, he knew I had an attempt on my life. He said: "You're lucky to have had only one."

Chrétien's trip would not arouse Washington's ire. "We felt we could easily manage the slight negative consequences of the visit," said Raymond Chrétien, Canada's ambassador to Washington and the Prime Minister's nephew.

Canadian officials also forcefully denied Ottawa has been asked to play an intermediary role between Castro and Clinton. "Did the Americans encourage us to make this trip? No," Ambassador Chrétien told *Maclean's*. "But the American business community is starting to put a lot of pressure on Washington to ease the sanctions. Castro is still seen as the devil, but he is the devil of a war that no longer exists. And the Republican majority in Congress is not only silent now, but they are being pushed to make a move by their own constituency of businessmen." The Prime Minister and Clinton spoke by phone at week's end, and agreed to discuss Cuba when they meet in Birmingham, England, at the G-7 summit of industrialized countries this month.

Chrétien stressed the need to 'adapt'



Canadian photographer Heidi Hollinger gets an autograph at a pre-dinner session: freewheeling

In that encouraging atmosphere, the Havana visit was a perfect foreign policy stroke for a Canadian leader who beams whenever he is given a chance to show independence from Washington. Liberal advisers say their successful stewardship of the global land mines treaty last year made it clear to them that they could find a niche in foreign affairs that pays political benefits at home. Not only was the land mines treaty popular with Canadians, it was treated with a rare lack of cynicism by the Ottawa press corps. So when the American Congress refused last year to give Clinton authority to negotiate a wider free trade deal in the western hemisphere, Chrétien saw an opportunity to assume a leadership role. At a summit in Santiago, Chile, last month, Canada agreed to chair the first round of negotiations aimed at forging a trade pact throughout the Americas.

Reintegrating Cuba into what Chrétien has taken to calling *una gran familia* of countries was an obvious follow-up, a piece of outstanding hemispheric housekeeping left over from the Cold War. Chrétien said he felt he was well placed to convince Castro that capitalism does not have to descend into dog-eat-dog savagery. Like others of his generation, he had been an early admirer of Castro in the late 1950s. "He was a very popular person, a young man taking on the Batista regime," the Prime Minister recalled last week after returning from Havana. Castro was a romantic figure then—"He had been in jail, he had risked his life, he wanted to change society," said Chrétien. "At that time, I was fighting the Duplessis regime [in Quebec], so, as a student, he was a star for a lot of us."

That star fizzled in the West as Castro's revolution aged along with him, and the reality of Cuban life fell far short of the revolutionary ideals. "He still wants to use communism. I don't believe in it, it's been proven it doesn't work, and I told him that," said Chrétien. But while the two men are very different politicians—Castro the self-styled visionary, an ideologue wedded to discredited ideas; Chrétien the pragmatist willing to reject vision in favor of whatever works—last week's encounter was not without common ground. "I'm a practical politician—that doesn't mean I don't have goals, that I don't want to have social justice," said Chrétien. "I'm just not doctrinaire on the means. My view is we have to have growth in the world so there will be more money for governments to give to people who are suffering in society. I'm not in politics to make the rich richer. Castro wants the same thing. He has a different technique."

That sense of common purpose colored the more freewheeling discussion between the two leaders over dinner. Typically for Castro, the meal was called for a later hour than the early-to-bed Chrétien is accustomed to. In a brightly lit dining room, the two gathered with just a handful of aides at 9 o'clock for drinks before dinner. The banter over wine and rum-based mojitos was friendly and animated, chatter ranging from the environment to the situation facing Canada's native peoples. "Castro was very much interested in picking the PM's brains about the world that was out there that Cuba is not a part of," said one official who was at the dinner.

But Chrétien had a more focused discussion in mind for the conversation over rock lobster and turkey: how countries can adapt to the forces of globalization. "Castro is convinced that globalization is a zero-sum game, in which the people suffer and a few neoliberals get rich," said one of the Canadian officials at the dinner. "The Prime Minister has confidence about the future, and made the case that it's not all bad news."

The key phrase for Chrétien, one he kept coming back to, was the need to adapt to change. The choice of words was important since Castro does not accept the premise that planned economies must manage a transition to capitalism. In Castro's mind, "transition" conjures visions of the criminal chaos that befell the countries of the Soviet Union, and the slogan "No to transition" is splashed in paint on Havana's cracked brickwork. But Castro seemed less hostile to the term "adapt," and Chrétien argued that Canada was an example of a prosperous liberal democracy in which disparities of wealth are not so great.

"That's why it's very important that he said Canada was a model for the future," said Chrétien once back in Ottawa. "I'm surprised the president picked it up." Castro's musings about the Canadian system may have been little more than mischief from a man who remains appalled by the social casualties of capitalism, and who famously declared, "history will absolve me." But offering Castro another perspective on the world outside his island can hardly hurt, a modest contribution from a pragmatist who may have given the ideologue something to consider. □

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Estrada on the hustings: facing heavy attacks on moral grounds

WORLD PHILIPPINES

Star for the masses

Say this about the whisky-loving womanizer and former action movie star who may become the next president of the Philippines: he doesn't take himself too seriously. During his current term as vice-president, Joseph Estrada, known to most Filipinos by his nickname, "Erap," and famous for his malapropisms in English, published a book called *ERAPtions: How to Speak English Without Really Trial*. A typical entry, with full-page cartoon, reads: "TV talk show host to Erap when he was still a senator, 'If you become president, what will you do about the abortion bill?' Without hesitation, Erap replies 'I'll pay it!' "

Rightly or wrongly, that image sums up the way much of Manila's elite views the 61 year old front-runner in the May 11 presidential election: a political version of *Dumb and Dumber*. "He doesn't engage with visions and thought," says psychologist and political analyst Cristina Montiel. Then she adds: "That's a mild way of putting it—he's just not very bright." There are nine other contenders—not counting former first lady Imelda Marcos, who pulled out of the race last week—but the latest survey puts Estrada well ahead in popularity, rating 34 per cent against 12 per cent for his nearest rival. Although such polls are not always a reliable gauge of Philippine elections, Estrada's strength appalls his critics—especially in the business community. Outgoing President Fidel Ramos, elected in 1992 for a constitutionally limited single term, has gained wide praise for turning the "sick man of Asia" into a coming economic tiger. Although the currency has been hit hard by Asia's financial crisis, the nation of 72 million has weathered the storm better than most of its neighbors. Now, many analysts fear for the Ramos legacy. "Without overstating," says a Western diplomat, "Ramos is seen as relatively clean. There is a question mark whether those standards will continue."

There could hardly be greater contrast than that between the slim, austere Ramos, a cigar-chewing former general who likes to talk policy, and Estrada, the slack-gutted, pompadour-coiffed former B-movie star who played the gunslinging hero saving the day from rich and powerful bad guys. As a senator from 1987 to 1992, Estrada's main achievement was a bill protecting the water buffalo. As vice-president, he raised controversy by joining in on raids—wielding his own high powered weapon—while heading a trigger-happy anti-crime commission. His penchants for card-playing, mistresses and Johnnie Walker Blue Label did not endear him to the middle class in a strongly Catholic country. But he has a huge following among the poor, who make up the majority of voters. He was elected vice-president in a separate contest in 1992 with twice as many votes as Ramos. Repeatedly, Estrada has said he will "be pro-poor and pro-country." He refers to his critics as "intellectual snobs" and defends his screen background with a nod to Ronald Reagan. "The most powerful nation in the world can elect a movie actor," he says. "I don't see why the Philippines can't."

A screen idol leads a colorful election race

Not that Estrada's rivals instil much high level confidence. Respected columnist Amando Doronila called the field "the most uninspiring set of pretenders to national leadership" in the 100 years since the United States took possession of the Philippines from Spain. Ramos is backing his "anointed" successor, House Speaker Jose de Venecia, but he trails Estrada, plagued by a wheeler-dealer image and alleged links to a bribery scandal. Former president Corazon Aquino, who took over from Marcos in 1986, supports ex-Manila mayor Alfredo Lim, known as "Dirty Harry" for his own shoot-first crackdown on crime while Manila's police chief. A dark horse is Senator Raul Roco, dubbed an "honorary woman" by colleagues for progressive legislation on rape and other issues. Popular with business, he is going after the youth and female constituencies of fading contender Miriam Defensor Santiago, an outspoken, pistol-packing judge who claimed Ramos gained his narrow victory over her only by fraud last time around.

In a memorably vicious campaign, Estrada has faced heavy attacks on his character. It is no secret that he lived with his mistress for 16 years before reuniting with his legal wife, had a string of other romances and produced at least seven children by various mothers, all of whom he says he supports. Early on in the campaign, however, the male candidates made what they called "a gentleman's pact" not to further pursue the mistress issue (a common situation, to be sure, in a country where divorce is still outlawed). Estrada has also said he no longer drinks. That has not stopped influential Cardinal Jaime Sin from campaigning against him on moral grounds, although one columnist compared Estrada to a Timex watch: "Takes a licking but keeps on ticking."

Estrada has still managed to gain some elite supporters, not least because many business people fear that de Venecia's patronage politics would be worse. To help him on economics, Estrada has pulled in 30 advisers, including nine Philippine officials working with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. "The guy is not naive," says sociologist Randy David. "He has a highly developed political sense and instinct for people—whom he can trust and not trust." Yet his victory is no sure thing. Analysts say that with so many candidates, the next president may need as little as a fifth of the votes to win. And given predictions of high levels of fraud in the election, Estrada could find that the bad guys hold all the cards.

BERTON WOODWARD *with* *KAREN EMMONS in Manila*

LOST



The [illegible] from's story were inspired by the real lives of homeless youth in Vancouver

The centre of the city is full of dead-ends. Everywhere you turn, the road leads nowhere. At least that's what it seemed like for me. I lived on those streets. They're a maze. And when you're hooked on drugs it's easy to get lost inside. I thought there was no way out. But there was. The Salvation Army. They took the time to help me clean-up. It wasn't easy. And it wasn't fast. I didn't say thank-you much but they never stopped believing I could make it. And I did. Now I'm off the street and back in school. All along I thought I was desperate for more drugs, but I was wrong. What I really needed was someone to care.





Sam Omelaniec, a member of The Salvation Army, believes in helping the lost find their way home. With your support, The Salvation Army's many outreach centres will be able to reach many other homeless youth

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HUNGER STRIKE OVER

Two Canadian prisoners in Brazil ended a 15-day hunger strike under a deal worked out by Sao Paulo's archbishop. Christine Lamont, 38, and David Spencer, 34, along with eight other prisoners, had demanded expulsion from the country to end what they consider an overly harsh 28-year sentence for a political kidnapping in 1989. A Foreign Affairs spokeswoman in Ottawa said the prisoners had been promised a review of their sentence and the prospect of day parole. Lamont's mother, Marilyn, said she believed the pair would later gain full parole, leading to their return to Canada.

ADMITTING TO GENOCIDE

Rwanda's prime minister during the height of the 1994 massacres pleaded guilty to six charges of genocide at a UN tribunal. A lawyer for ex-banker Jean Kambanda, who was arrested in Kenya last year, said he would "take the rap" for his government's part in the slaughter of up to 800,000 mainly Tutsi Rwandans by Hutu extremists. Kambanda, a Hutu, was the first senior official accused at the tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, to admit to genocide. He faces a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. In separate genocide trials, the Rwandan government recently executed 22 people.

AN IRA REFUSAL

The Irish Republican Army insisted it would not give up its weapons under terms of the proposed Northern Ireland peace agreement. The statement angered Protestants amid a campaign for the pact's approval in island-wide referendums on May 22. But talks chairman George Mitchell said he was confident the IRA would eventually agree. Former Canadian military chief John de Chastelain is in charge of the arms decommissioning.

INTERNET MURDER CASE

A man who admitted in an Internet forum that he killed his daughter three years ago was charged with murder. Computer programmer Larry Froistad, 29, confessed to police in Bowman, N.D., after telling an on-line alcoholics support group that he had, while drunk, deliberately set a fire that killed his five-year-old daughter, who was the subject of a bitter custody battle. Other forum participants eventually called police, setting off a debate over on-line confidentiality.



JOY AMID PAIN: Israelis celebrate 50 years of statehood in the Tel Aviv square named for peacemaker Yitzhak Rabin, assassinated by a Jewish extremist in 1995. Despite the joyful mood, Israel's divisions dogged the anniversary. The secular Bat-Sheva dance company boycotted a birthday gala after religious Jews demanded the dancers not strip to their underwear onstage. Rightists and leftists staged rival demonstrations at the site of a controversial Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem. Israel sealed off the West Bank and Gaza, fearing Palestinian attacks.

An ugly toxic spill in Spain

The Spanish government was considering criminal charges against a Toronto-based international mining company as evidence mounted that an ecologically disastrous spill of toxic waste may have been preventable. Boliden Ltd., owned by Swedish and Canadian interests, promised to pay for the cleanup, estimated by environmentalists at $170 million. But it denied negligence, saying the ground beneath a holding pool at its mine west of Seville suddenly shifted, causing its containing walls to give way. Local scientists, though, said there have been warnings since 1979 about the dangers of waste from the mine contaminating a nearby wildlife preserve. A Spanish engineer was fired by the company after he warned of structural problems in 1995. Environmentalists also blamed the Spanish government for lax inspection and for misleading the European Union about how close the toxic waste was to the Donana National Park.

Volunteers led by the Greenpeace environmental group hauled away 10 tons of fish killed by a 30-km swath of cadmium, zinc and iron that flowed down the Guadiamar River. Hastily built dikes diverted the sludge away from the park. But experts feared that birds eating the fish would spread the poison. Others predicted it may take 25 years to restore crop land that had supported 2,000 farm families.

Getting ready for Europe's new money

After 30 years of wrangling, European leaders took the final steps to create a single currency at a summit in Brussels. The euro will challenge the dollar as the premier unit on global financial markets when it comes into effect on Jan. 1, worth about $1.56 at current rates. Euro notes and coins will replace all local money in the 11 participating European Union countries by Jan. 1, 2002. Britain, Sweden and Denmark have opted out for now, while Greece hopes to join in 2001. Former Dutch central banker Wim Duisenberg was named head of a new European Central Bank after leaders made a compromise with the French, who wanted their own candidate.

THE PC SQUEEZE

BY JOE CHIDLEY

Falling prices are shaking up the computer industry

There is no magic involved, but business is booming at Voodoo Computer Studio. In the computer store's lobby in Calgary, boxed monitors are piled high against the wall, ready to be delivered to what company president Rahul Sood says is a record number of customers. Like others in the PC industry, Sood has seen demand for home computers soar in recent months. Sales this year are nearly triple what they were a year ago, with the result that Voodoo is now planning a three-storey addition to its current building, increasing its display space to 270 square metres from 110. "People," says Sood with a smile, "are just computer-crazy right now."

Small wonder, considering that personal computers have never been so cheap. In the old days—which, in the constantly accelerating time line of the computer industry, means about a year ago—a PC buyer had to spend anywhere from $3,000 to $4,000 to get an above-average system fast enough to run the latest software applications. Today, the same computer—or in many cases, an even more powerful one—can cost half as much or less. Welcome to the world of the sub-$1,000 PC (by the miracle of exchange rates, it's more like the sub-$1,500 PC in Canada), long thought to be the threshold below which computers would become true mass-market items.

According to PC Data Inc., a Reston, Va.-based market research firm, so-called segment-zero PCs, the industry term for computers costing less than $1,000 (U.S.), comprised less than one-fifth of total U.S. computer sales last year. In March, the figure hovered around 50 per cent. The cheap-PC trend is shaking up every part of the industry, from giants such as Intel Corp. of Santa Clara, Calif.—which produces about 90 per cent of the world's microprocessor chips—to individual retailers.

Computer software makers and parts suppliers are gearing prices down, too. In March, Corel Corp. of Ottawa cut prices on its WordPerfect office suites by as much as 50 per cent. Similarly, ATI Technologies Inc. of Thornhill, Ont.—one of the world's largest suppliers of video adapters—announced a low-cost graphics board specifically engineered for the entry-level PC market. "Fundamentally, we love the sub-$1,000 PC market," says Henry Quan, ATI's vice-president of corporate marketing. "It's increasing the total available size of the PC market, and it's going to allow us to sell more graphics adapters."

PC price cuts are nothing new, of course. The computer industry is founded on the principle that microprocessor speeds will double every 18 months, and that as companies such as Intel introduce new and faster hardware, older systems will lose their value. Until recently, buying a cheap PC usually meant buying an obsolete one, or settling for a clone based on cut-rate or even pirated components. These days, however, inexpensive machines are available even from highly regarded brand names in the office-equipment business. Compaq, Hewlett-Packard, IBM and Dell among them. While not equipped with cutting-edge technology, a typical budget system today features a 200 MHz or faster processor, a 24-speed CD-ROM drive, a minimum of two gigabytes of hard drive space and a fast modem—good enough to meet the needs of most home computer users.

The rapid decline in PC prices, analysts say, is due in part to weak PC sales worldwide last year and slowing demand in financially troubled Southeast Asia. Another important factor is software. Since at least the release of Microsoft's Windows 95, which required a Pentium-class chip to function well, there have been few popular programs that demand more powerful and more expensive processors—most software titles run just fine on the new cheaper systems. On top of that, the popularity of the Internet—now with 100 million users worldwide—is helping to offset the technological trend towards ever-increasing computer power: a fast processor like Intel's recent Pentium II is not nearly so important to most Web surfers as the speed of their modems. "The industry has tried to convince people that 'you need a Pentium II, you need this or that,' but let's be honest," says Mark Bell, associate publisher of *Monitor Magazine*, an Ontario computer monthly. "How many people are running high-end graphic processing suites or multiple pages of spreadsheets? They do word processing, e-mail, surf the Web, play a few games—and they don't need much processing power for that."

The idea of a "good-enough" computer may sound innocuous, but it has sent shock waves through the computer industry. And while major manufacturers have scrambled to meet consumer demand, low PC prices have hurt their bottom lines. Last month, Compaq Corp., the world's largest personal-computer maker, reported a 96-per-cent drop in first-quarter profits to $23 million compared with a year earlier—a result, in part, of recent price cuts. Intel—now in a neck-and-neck battle with Advanced Micro Devices Inc. of Sunnyvale, Calif., which supplies the processors in about half of all sub-$1,000 PCs—reported first-quarter profits of $205 billion, down by 27 per cent. Over the next six months, the company plans to eliminate 3,000 jobs from a workforce of 68,000.

The significance of the cheap-PC trend can be seen in the changes it has spurred at Intel, which for more than two decades has been pushing the technology envelope with ever faster processors. Last month, the company unveiled its first processor specifically designed for the sub-$1,000 market: the Celeron, a modified version of the Pentium II, without the more expensive chip's super speedy cache memory, but fast enough, Intel claims, to meet the needs of many users. Douglas Cooper, Intel's marketing manager for Canada, says the Celeron is an attempt to break the pattern of so-called trickle-down pricing—taking last year's technology and marketing it at the low end this year. "That works fine if you're looking at a price drop from $4,000 to $2,500, but what became obvious last year was that at $1,499, you can't do that," says Cooper. "You need to design a microprocessor for that price point."

The Celeron, which Intel will ship to PC makers at about $215 per chip (compared with more than $1,140 for its recently released 400 MHz Pentium IIs), is a response to the bifurcation of the market, Cooper adds. "The idea of two separate brands is that if you consider yourself to be a consumer with a performance bent, then the Pentium II processor is the right choice," he says. "But if you just know you need a computer and are really kind of dabbling, then systems based on the Celeron processor will give you the best combination of performance and affordability."

In part, the double-streaming of Intel's product line is an attempt to protect its high-performance chips from price erosion. But some observers are skeptical that the gambit will work. Steve Baker, senior hardware analyst for PC Data, says manufacturers are finding it increasingly difficult to coax consumers into buying high-end systems, currently priced at about $4,000 in Canada. "Sure, it's great to have those speedy things," says Baker, "but the fact is that customers are voting with their feet." As a result, he says, the "good enough" PC is putting pressure on the prices of all computers. "What the low-end PC is doing," Baker adds, "is not just building the low end, but destroying the high end."

Many analysts expect further cuts as the industry gravitates towards so-called network computers—stripped down machines designed specifically for use over the Internet or a local-area network—and inexpensive set top boxes that allow people to surf the World Wide Web using their televisions. For consumers weary of an industry that has a reputation for promoting the next big (and expensive) thing, that is welcome news indeed.

With MARY NEMETH in Calgary



Typical configuration:

Pentium II 233 MMX
32 megabytes RAM
2.1 gigabyte hard drive
24X CD-ROM
16-bit sound card
14-inch monitor

PH. LEE SNEL/MACLEAN'S COMPUTER COURTESY OF MEGADOMECOLLECTION.C

BUSINESS

Score one for the ecologists



Greenpeace protest in March: European companies are responding to the pressure tactics

Jack Munro lights his second cigarette The discussion is about his least favorite subject: Greenpeace and its efforts to, in Munro's words, "shut down logging" on Canada's West Coast For Munro, a former logger and union boss who now runs the pro-industry Forest Alliance of British Columbia, the environmental group has become more of an anathema than ever "Greenpeace is really appealing to people's emotions and treating the truth with God damn disdain," he says. Munro is frustrated because he appears to be losing the battle for public support In recent weeks, there have been signs that B C forest companies are acceding to the environmentalists' demands by reconsidering the way they log old-growth forests

For decades, eco-activists have criticized the traditional practice of clear-cutting the B C rainforest—felling every hemlock, cedar and fir in the logging area, disfiguring pristine landscapes Although the result is not pretty, the industry says it is the safest method available and the soundest way to allow second-growth forest to generate Greenpeace and its allies in the environmental movement, however, insist clear-cutting is unnecessarily destructive Over the past two years, they have mounted an intense protest campaign boarding boats carrying B C wood products and convincing customers to cancel orders. Its goal is to preserve what it says are the 20 per cent of the B C coastal forest valleys that remain unlogged.

The message seems to be getting through to forest companies At MacMillan Bloedel Ltd.'s annual meeting last month, chief executive officer Tom Stephens strongly suggested his company will change its method of clear-cutting "We are hearing more and more from our customers that

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they, and their customers, don't want wood from old-growth clear-cuts," said Stephens. "More and more we are asking ourselves if clear-cutting old growth is the best economic harvesting method." Other companies, such as International Forest Products Ltd. (Interfor), are watching MacBlo closely. "We think this is a good thing," allows Fred Lowenberger, Interfor's senior vice-president. "In many ways, it follows what we have been thinking of doing in this company."

Many environmentalists are enthusiastic about the prospect of reform. "It's the first time we've heard any industry CEO question the value of clear-cutting," says Tamara Stark of the Vancouver chapter of Greenpeace. "It is a huge shift when you consider how big a practice clear-cutting is." Adriane Carr, an executive director of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, says Stephens's announcement "is pretty wonderful." If Interfor follows suit, she adds, "I'll shout Hallelujah. They are not known to be one of the most progressive companies."

The shift in forest company thinking comes on the heels of a series of financial setbacks for the industry, including the economic downturn in Asia and restrictions on lumber exports to the United States. At a time when forestry profits are elusive, Greenpeace's tactics are starting to hurt. "We've got serious problems in Europe," says Munro. "We're losing customers and we're losing them based on untruths reported by Greenpeace." Lowenberger says Interfor has received at least 20 letters from customers inquiring about the company's logging practices, although he adds the financial impact "has been negligible."

It may be negligible now but the problem is growing. Richard Burbidge, a British wholesaler who buys $3.5 million worth of B.C. wood annually, told B.C. forestry officials that some of his customers are demanding so-called eco-certified wood products. He said his company's reputation "will suffer if we continue to ignore the pressures to take action."

While most environmentalists welcome MacBlo's apparent change of heart, some say that any such decision will be moot because the company has already logged most of its old-growth forest on the coast. "You want to give MacBlo credit, but there is still a residue of skepticism," says David Boyd of the Vancouver-based Sierra Legal Defence Fund. "For us to pop the champagne cork because of a few remarks from a MacMillan Bloedel CEO is a bit premature." Talk like that continues to fuel Jack Munro's cigarette habit. "Unfortunately," he concludes with another puff, "we've got to treat Greenpeace's nonsense seriously." Evidently, the industry already is.

JENNIFER HUNTER *in Vancouver*

Taking on an industry

- **November, 1996:** Environmental groups launch the Canadian Rainforest Network, which calls for a moratorium on old-growth logging
- **June, 1997:** Sixty activists block access to a logging site near Bella Coola, B.C.
- **March, 1998:** Protesters board the Saga Wind and prevent it from unloading Western Forest Products lumber in Glasgow. Meanwhile Greenpeace members chain themselves to the gate of a German chemical company to pressure it not to buy pulp from Vancouver-based Western Forest Products Ltd.
- **April 1998:** Three European lumber distributors cancel contracts with B.C. forest companies.



Sheldon Nadal D.P.M.
Doctor of Podiatric Medicine

You Can Walk Away From Foot Pain

In the past the only treatment for bunions, corns and other foot problems was painful hospital surgery or orthopaedic shoes. Now there is an advanced treatment which lets most patients walk away pain free.

Sheldon Nadal, Doctor of Podiatric Medicine, specializes in ambulatory or minimal incision foot surgery for treatment of bunions, hammertoes, corns on top or between toes, as well as certain types of callouses.

The ambulatory technique is advantageous for a number of reasons," explains Nadal. First, there is very little discomfort or disability. This is accomplished by working through very small openings in the skin with special instruments. This reduces soft tissue work and means that most people only need Aspirin or Tylenol afterward.

The work can be performed painlessly in the office under local anaesthetic while our patients watch television.

In addition, Nadal says post operative casts or cruiches are rarely needed. Our patients can walk right away, get back to their normal activities and work much sooner. Seniors do not have to be bedridden.

Nadal also performs laser surgery for ingrown nails and warts and treats heel and foot pain.

Nadal earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto in 1975 and received his Doctor of Podiatric Medicine degree in Cleveland in 1979. He completed his residence in foot surgery in Philadelphia in 1980.



Before



After bunion removal

Following his residency he remained in Philadelphia to study the ambulatory foot surgery technique of one of the pioneers of the field.

Says Nadal, "I knew I had to learn the technique because his patients were able to walk right away with very little discomfort.

Nadal has treated people from as far away as England, Belgium, Germany, the Ukraine, Israel and South America.

To find out how you can be helped, contact Sheldon Nadal for a consultation at his clinic at 586 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 501, Toronto, Ontario M4P 1P2 (416) 486-9917



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Address where certificate and crest to be sent - if different from donor's. All receipts will be automatically sent to donor APT

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Maclean's
WHAT MATTERS TO CANADIANS

Ross Laver



Time for a recession?

The unemployment rate is gradually falling, housing sales are revving up and Canadians—those outside of British Columbia, at any rate—are once again starting to feel good about the economy. Whatever can it all mean?

Why, it must be time for another recession, of course.

Sounds crazy? Not if you make your living studying that strange and wondrous phenomenon known as the business cycle. In the topsy-turvy world of economists and money managers, good is bad and bad is good. A declining jobless rate, in other words, tends to lead to an increase in personal incomes which heightens the risk of inflation and pushes up interest rates. That causes businesses to cut back on expansion and discourages consumers from spending. Presto: the economy goes into the tank. They don't call economics the "dismal science" for nothing.

> People who think the good times are almost over can point to all sorts of troubling indicators

Granted, inflation isn't a problem now in either Canada or the United States, in part because the Asian debacle has sliced deeply into world demand for raw materials and energy. But those who believe the good times are nearing an end can still point to all manner of worrisome indicators, from an excessively frothy stock market to the recent wave of bank megamergers on both sides of the border. On Wall Street, veteran money managers are tossing around phrases like "bubble economy" and "asset-price inflation." Scary stuff, that, particularly if you happen to be up to your eyeballs in debt and heavily invested in stocks and stock-based mutual funds. In this market, that describes millions of middle-class Canadians.

On that rather depressing note, here's something else that might be worth fretting about. For the first time since the late 1980s, the job market for journalists in Canada is looking healthy.

The reason this is bad news has to do with the business cycle. When the economy is in the dumpster and consumers are reluctant to open their wallets, companies naturally look for every possible means of saving money. In addition to laying off staff and cancelling plans for new factories or stores, they also cut back on advertising. When that happened in 1991 and 1992, newspapers and magazines across the country slammed on the brakes. Dozens of smaller publications were driven into the ground. Elsewhere, layoffs and hiring freezes took hold as media companies struggled to cope with declining revenues and record losses.

The economy as a whole started to pick up in 1993, driven largely by increasing U.S. demand for Canadian exports. But the balance sheets of Canada's big media corporations remained in dismal shape until late 1996. That's because ad spending is what economists call a "lagging indicator"—it tends to follow changes in the overall economy, for the simple reason that most companies try to avoid shelling out big money on advertising unless they themselves are feeling prosperous. Hence, media company profits are also lagging indicators. They generally hit their peak late in the cycle, when other parts of the economy are already beginning to slow down or slip into reverse.

Think of it this way: when was the last time anyone in Canada launched a major newspaper? Answer: 1988, just as that decade's boom was drawing to a close. That's when the Toronto Sun Publishing Corp. decided to transform the weekly *Financial Post* into a daily. Good on them, but too bad about the timing. For eight solid years, the Post lost money—an estimated $100 million in total before the paper finally made it into the black.

A decade later, the newspaper business is positively jumping. Both the Halifax *Chronicle-Herald* and *The London Free Press* have recently sprouted Sunday editions. Quebecor Inc., which owns tabloids in Montreal, Quebec City and Winnipeg, is talking about buying one or more newspaper chains in the United States. *Maclean's*, *The Globe and Mail* and numerous other publications have expanded their reporting and editing staffs. And Conrad Black is getting ready to launch a new national newspaper, the first since the *Post*. Pay levels are rising in the industry and optimism is everywhere.

Remember, you read it here first. When journalists are in demand, the next recession can't be too far off.

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www.mssoc.ca

CANWEST RAISES OFFER

CanWest Global Communications Corp increased its hostile bid for WIC Western International Communications Ltd The new offer is $43.50 in cash for each of WIC's voting and non-voting shares. The bid exceeds an earlier cash-and-stock offer from Shaw Communications of Calgary, but can only go forward if an Ontario court overturns a deal WIC has with Shaw

BANK MERGER DEFENDED

The number of jobs eliminated by the proposed merger between the Royal Bank and the Bank of Montreal will be "considerably lower" than the 10,000 to 20,000 feared by bank critics, Royal chairman John Cleghorn said He declined to provide an estimate, but said fears surrounding proposed bank mergers in Canada are unfounded.

CELESTICA TO GO PUBLIC

Celestica Inc. of Toronto launched the biggest high-tech initial public offering in Canadian history, with an equity issue worth up to $570 million The company, the world's third-largest maker of computer parts, is owned by Toronto-based Onex Corp., which also has interests in airline catering, sugar refining, auto parts and other industries.

MOLSON SELLS STAKE

Molson Companies Ltd. sold its minority stake in Home Depot Canada to the the building-supply retailer's U.S. parent for $375 million. Molson president James Arnett said the sale is part of a strategy to return the company to its core brewing business.

BMW SNAGS ROLLS-ROYCE

One of Britain's most famous brands, Rolls-Royce, is being sold to Germany's BMW for $813 million The parent company of Rolls-Royce Motor Co , Vickers PLC, announced the sale over the objections of some patriotic British shareholders Europe's biggest carmaker, Volkswagen, reportedly tabled a higher bid but was rejected

TSE HEAD ENDORSED

The board of governors of the Toronto Stock Exchange publicly endorsed president Rowland Fleming's leadership amid published criticism from unnamed brokerage executives. Fleming has come under fire recently because of problems associated with launching the exchange's new computer system

Alive—and kicking back

Not dead—just delayed That was the official word last week on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, a controversial treaty that would limit the power of governments to regulate foreign investment.



Johnston. the talks will go on

In Paris, trade ministers of the 29-country Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development missed their self-imposed deadline for agreeing on a final text of the MAI. Still, OECD secretary general Donald Johnston, a former Liberal cabinet minister under prime minister Pierre Trudeau, angrily refuted reports that an international coalition of left-leaning groups had torpedoed the deal. He also dismissed as "wild statements" those groups' claims that the MAI would prevent governments from enforcing environmental and labor standards on foreign corporations.

The delay, Johnston said, stems not from outside pressure, but from disagreements within the OECD. He said the group plans to use the next few months to publicize the MAI's benefits, including estimates of the number of new jobs that would result from giving companies more confidence about investing abroad. He urged Ottawa, especially Trade Minister Sergio Marchi, to more directly challenge opponents of the MAI such as Maude Barlow of the nationalist Council of Canadians "I don't think it's my responsibility to take them on," he told *Maclean's* "But why isn't the government taking them on? Why isn't Marchi taking them on?"

The price of greed

Given the nature of the enterprise, the scam business tends to be a poor source of useful statistics Nonetheless, a trend is emerging—one that involves large amounts of money being extracted by Nigerian con artists from victims who are themselves charged with theft or fraud. Yet another example—the biggest to date in Canada—surfaced last week when an employee of Electro Canada Ltd., a Toronto-based maker of extension cords, was charged with stealing $1 9 million from his employer between October, 1997, and March of this year After receiving a fax offering a handsome payoff in exchange for helping to move $50 million from Nigeria to a friendly foreign bank, the 35-year-old man allegedly transferred hundreds of thousands of dollars at a time to accounts around the world. It was, the Nigerian scamsters said, to be a sign of his "good faith " Not to mention unbelievably bad judgment

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Canada's gross domestic product grew strongly in February and is on track to record a 1998 increase of more than three per cent The biggest gains came in manufacturing, construction and utilities sectors hard hit by January's ice storms In eastern Canada The effects of the storms have not entirely dissipated, however The insurance industry fell 11 5 per cent in February after a 6 7 per cent drop a month earlier Department store sales are moving in the other direction—up 12 4 per cent in March over the same month a year earlier.

In the United States, the pace of economic growth is even higher than in Canada That has fed fears of higher inflation and interest rates, but a government report on wage costs during the first quarter showed little upward pressure. Financial markets rose sharply on the news

BANKRUPTCIES

Consumer and business failures

February, 1997	8,450
February, 1998	7,434

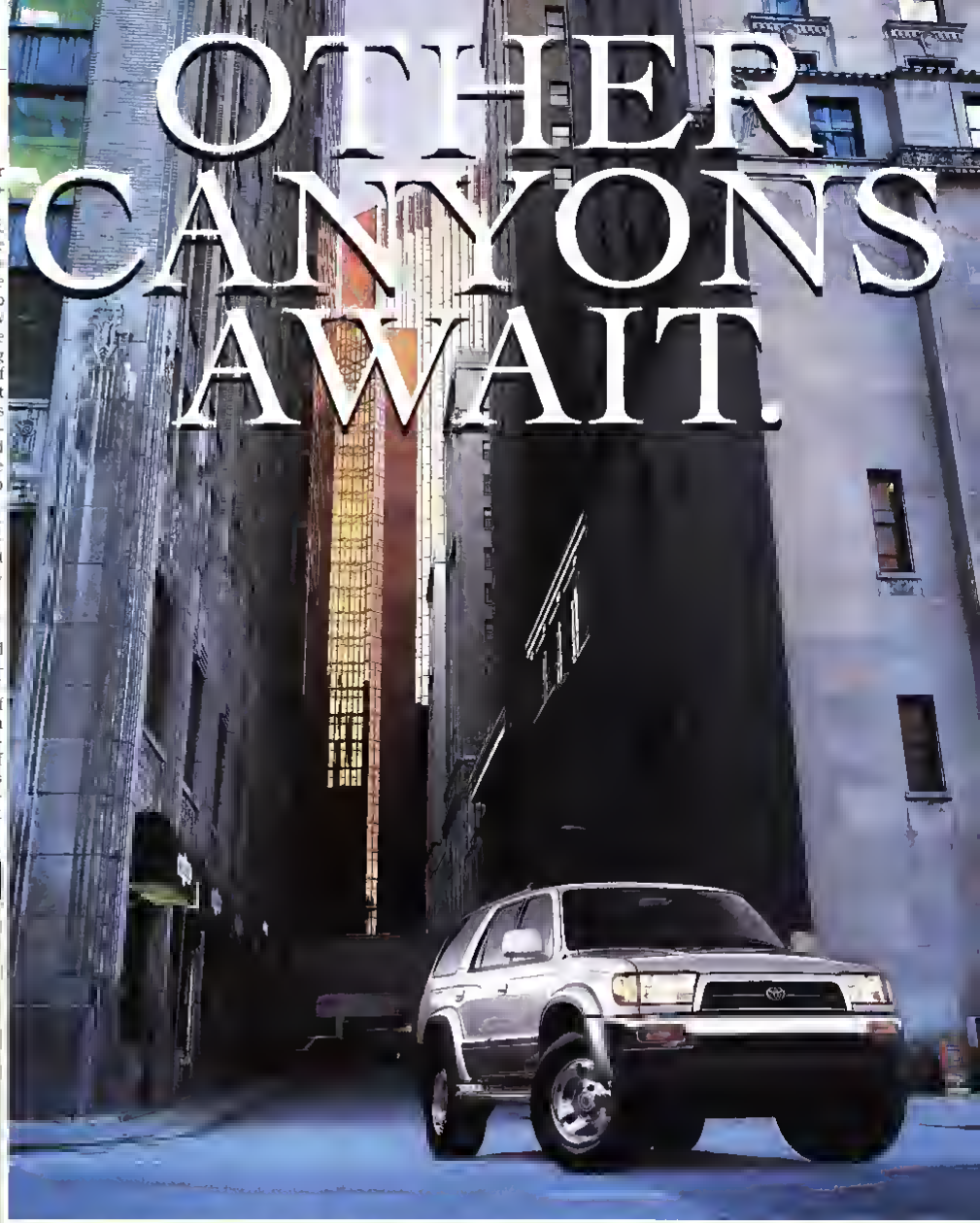
SOURCE: INDUSTRY CANADA

"Inflation is likely to slowly creep upwards in the next few months, largely due to a red-hot domestic economy and a bottoming out in oil prices "

—Nesbitt Burns

"With the Canadian economy showing continued broad-based strength, the Bank of Canada will aim for tighter monetary conditions before the end of the year Within the next few months, however, increases in interest rates remain unlikely "

—TD Bank



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ARCTIC CAT



Peter C. Newman

A blustery, combative and shameless titan

A few decades ago, when Toronto was truly bicultural—British and Irish, except for the bankers, who were Scottish—the acknowledged leader of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite was an exuberant, profane, funny and charismatic animator named John White (I swear) Hughes Bassett. He died last week, at 82, all but forgotten by the city he once dominated like a mythological titan, running its hockey team, football team, most exciting newspaper and most popular television station.

Toronto was a closed and provincial place in his time, and he was a fierce partisan of its absolute supremacy. When I asked him in the early 1980s what he thought about Western Canada, he hesitated not a moment before booming out: "I don't care how much God damn oil they discover in Alberta. Toronto—and not Calgary—is the place you do the deals. You get out to Western Canada, you know, Vancouver and all those places—and you're away from the action. This is where it's at."

John Bassett, who cut an imposing figure (six feet, four inches, 206 lb.), was so compelling because he overcame his natural WASP prejudices, and was, for example, an enthusiastic booster of Israeli independence. In recognition of his contributions, the Toronto Jewish community's exclusive Primrose Club, then just as adamantly anti-WASP as the Toronto Club was anti-Semitic, made an exception and invited him to join. When his name went up on the Primrose's notice board as a prospective member, Bassett scribbled beside it the anonymous warning: "You know what happens when you let one in!" and laughed uproariously as he watched members read his little message, wisely nodding to themselves as they walked away.

> Toronto-centric John Bassett was so compelling, in part, because he bluntly overcame his natural WASP prejudices

His family's Canadian roots extended back to 1909 when his father arrived from Northern Ireland and joined the Montreal *Gazette*, where he eventually became publisher. John Bassett Sr. served as a major during the First World War and then purchased the *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, which later passed from the Bassett family to Conrad Black. In his book *Duplessis*, Black characterizes the elder Bassett as "political, combative, blustery pro-French, unscrupulous, shameless"—a description that equally fit the younger Bassett.

Like his father, Bassett worked as a reporter—for *The Globe and Mail*—and had his journalistic career interrupted by war, and he, too, rose to major's rank. He purchased *The Toronto Telegram* in 1952 in a unique partnership with John David Eaton, then running the family department store. The two men created a trust named Baton (named, according to Bassett, not after parts of the partners' last names, but for the intersection of BAy and WellingTON streets) leaving their corporate assets to their children. In February, 1984, the Eatons bought out the two surviving Bassett children, but in the intervening 32 years the families dominated Toronto's power structure.

Bassett made lightning decisions. When the CIBC was building its $100-million Commerce Court head office in the early 1970s, it needed to buy a piece of real estate Bassett owned, but none of its executives dared approach Big John. Finally, the bank's chairman, Neil McKinnon, called him to see if he could strike a deal.

"Sure," said Bassett. "My price is $3,200,000."

"Well, my price is $2,800,000," said McKinnon.

"Let's split the difference?"

"OK."

The transaction, a big one for its day, had taken exactly 60 seconds.

Bassett was a great if sometimes overbearing father. Johnny F., his eldest and most accomplished son who died at 47 of brain cancer in 1986, inherited his father's bluntness. "It's not a handicap being John Bassett's boy," he once said. "I have an excellent relationship with Dad. He's a hell of a sounding board and he's a bright, bright son of a bitch. I don't remember ever feeling pressure from being John Bassett's son. We're two different people." (Johnny F.'s younger brother Doug has had his own moments of his father's bluntness, like the time he told Toronto's Cardinal Carter: "I just can't believe that Mary was a virgin.")

The *Tely* was the most exciting and most eccentric newspaper Toronto ever had, reflecting its publisher's joie de vivre and quixotic politics. He was an ardent Tory, ran unsuccessfully for the party twice and seriously considered contesting its leadership in 1967.

I remember being told by Beland Honderich, when he named me editor-in-chief of *The Toronto Star* in 1969, that we had one and only one editorial objective: to "beat the *Tely*." We did, and in 1971 it folded. Left without a personal platform, Big John was never the same after that. I recall meeting him about a decade later at a party given by book publisher Anna Porter. I hadn't seen him for a while, and when I asked what he was doing these days, Bassett—who never learned to whisper—bellowed: "Oh, not much. Mostly making love to Isabel." (Isabel Bassett, his wife, was a *Telegram* reporter when he divorced to marry her. She now is a Mike Harris cabinet minister.)

Bassett became a partner in Maple Leaf Gardens (then known as the Carlton Street Mint), the Toronto Argonauts football team, and was granted the city's first private television licence, for station CFTO, which turned into another mint.

So many of our business leaders seldom say what they really mean and defer to anyone within radar range. That's why we treasure the memory of John Bassett. He was a giant in a land of pygmies.

The Curse of CASINOS

COVER

BY JOHN NICOL and STEPHANIE NOLEN

Wearing a tiara and bell-skirted dress, the bride swept down the grand staircase of Casino Niagara like Scarlett O'Hara. For a brief moment, at 2:30 a.m. on a recent Sunday, her wedding party's early morning stroll interrupted patrons engaged in Canada's new national pastime. Gamblers stuck in a slot-machine stupor or crowded around green baize tables looked up and, at the urging of the wedding party, clapped half-heartedly. But within seconds, they turned their attention back to the tick-ticking of roulette wheels, the slapping of cards, the tinny cha-chink sound of slot machine payoffs. The country's most successful casino was pulling in another $4 million for the weekend—and no one but the wedding party was headed for the door.

For governments and casino operators, gambling has provided the basis for a very profitable marriage. There are now 55 casinos in Canada, earning $2.5 billion a year of which governments pocket $1.2 billion. The lion's share of that action is in Central Canada, where five glitzy casinos—in Ontario, Niagara Falls, Windsor and Casino Rama near Orillia, in Quebec, Hull and Montreal—raked in close to $2 billion. But other forms of gambling have also flourished, especially video lottery terminals (VLTs)—the hot-ticket item in the Maritimes and much of Western Canada (page 48). Add them, along with lotteries, bingos and horse racing, to the mix and gambling represents a $27-billion industry in Canada, with the average household betting $1,200 every year—more than twice what American households wager.

In the case of casinos, they bring jobs, tourism and urban revitalization to towns across the country. That, at least, is what governments and casino promoters from Sydney, N.S., to Nanaimo, B.C., have promised. But economists, police, psychologists, social workers and citizens groups tell a different story. Casinos destroy at least one job for every one they create, they cause bankruptcies that bleed communities dry, they breed crime and corrode families. Fear of the menace has spurred on an army of volunteers to keep casinos at bay. But cash-strapped governments, hooked on gambling revenues, are searching for new ways to feed their addiction. "We shouldn't have to exist," says lawyer Connie Fogal, Vancouver spokeswoman for a nationwide movement called Citizens Against Gambling Expansion. "We elect people to protect the citizenry, and they are corrupting the citizens instead. Our elected people have become our gambling industry."

At the Canadian end of the Rainbow Bridge, which spans the Niagara River, an old tourist town's newest attraction is taking in money with the speed of water going over the nearby falls. Crowned by a tower of flashing lights, Casino Niagara appears to be a gleaming example of what the pro-gambling lobby promises: a casino on the Las Vegas Nev., model attracting foreigners, namely U.S. citizens from the other side of the river, legally separating them from their money—and sending social problems back across the border with them.

The 17-month-old casino has been heralded as a savior for the economically depressed city. One local banker says the establishment, which in its first full year of operation took in $512 million, has been a catalyst for the rejuvenation of Niagara Falls. It has directly created 3,600 full- and part-time jobs at the casino, while casino operators claim to have indirectly spawned another 3,000 jobs in the supply and tourism sectors. Bridge crossings from the United States are up 11 per cent, and entrepreneurs credit the casino for all the good news.

It has come at a price. Aris Centeno became enthralled by gambling while working at Casino Niagara. Barred from playing at his workplace, he travelled to Casino Rama, where he lost several thousand dollars one February night and hanged himself in his motel room, leaving behind a wife and young daughter. Dixon Wininger, a 32-year-old St. Catharines father of two and a regular at Casino Niagara's Caribbean stud poker tables, robbed two banks last summer to feed his gambling addiction and is now serving time in a Brantford, Ont., jail.

Gambling brings revenues—and new social ills



The casino may have led Wininger to crime, but others were already there. Police privately say that loan-sharking and extortion in the Niagara area have increased dramatically since the advent of the casino. Publicly, law enforcement officials are silent on the issue—for fear of embarrassing their political masters, as some officers quietly acknowledge. But the overall crime rate in Niagara Falls has risen 10 per cent since the casino opened, and reported instances of people passing counterfeit money, mostly Canadian $50 and $100 bills, went from 129 in 1996 to 693 in 1997, the casino's first year.

The statistics do not tell the story of the longtime Niagara area automotive factory employee who stole parts from work, sold them to feed his gambling addiction, and was quickly retired. In a tale that has been repeated across Canada, other residents have quietly gone bankrupt. "We had one guy who wouldn't leave the casino and missed two days of work," says Glenn Lyons, an employee counsellor at General Motors in St. Catharines who, in the past six months, has referred a dozen problem gamblers for treatment. "We had to get two guys to drag him out. It shows you the power of it. It has developed some jobs, but at what expense?"

Some observers blame the Olympics for giving the biggest boosts to gaming in Canada. In 1969, Ottawa decriminalized some forms of gambling after heavy pressure from the Quebec government, which wanted a lottery to finance the 1976 Montreal Olympic games (taxpayers were still left with a $1-billion debt). In 1984, as part of a funding deal for the 1988 Winter Games in Calgary,

the federal government shifted all control of gambling to the provinces.

Casinos got their start soon after decriminalization. In 1969, the Social Credit government of W. A. C. Bennett in British Columbia legalized a low-betting form of charity casinos. Alberta established the first permanent charity casino in 1986, with British Columbia following suit the next year. Canada's first commercial casino opened on the eve of 1990: the Crystal Casino in Winnipeg's Hotel Fort Garry. Montreal was next, in 1993, with the Casino de Montréal in the revamped Quebec pavilion at the Expo 67 site.

Today, only Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are without casinos. The profusion of gambling—and the willingness of governments to sanction it—have left many critics shaking their heads. "Every time the public is asked if they want more legalized gambling, the public turns it down," says Jim Gray, a prominent Calgary businessman who is leading a citizens' fight in Alberta to restrict VLTs. "But the governments fell into this source of money with nary a second thought, with no feel for the long-term costs."

Perhaps nowhere does the casino dream ring more hollow than in Sydney. Two and a half years after it opened, Cape Breton is still waiting for the 240 tourists a day the operators of the Sheraton Casino promised. The casino had made only $1.3 million profit by the beginning of this year (paltry compared with other sites across Canada). But ITT Sheraton Canada Inc., a hotel operator, is paying the provincial government $25 million a year for four years for exclusive rights to run the two casinos in the province (the other is in Halifax). And opponents say that the infusion of cash into provincial coffers means that the Sydney casino will stay open—in spite of mounting evidence of its negative local impact.

Bingos once funded dozens of Cape Breton charities. Now, no match for the glitzy casino down the road, they can barely scare up a crowd. The new establishment was meant to fill that gap by donating 40 per cent of its profits to charities and native bands—but the Nova Scotia Gaming Commission has yet to give charities a penny. (Ten native bands that signed a deal with the provincial government promising not to operate their own casinos split a $700,000 payout in March; the province says charities will get the next one.) As for the social costs, one employee calls the casino the worst thing to ever happen to Sydney. "I sit there and watch my neighbors, who I know don't have the money, gambling it away, for nothing," she says, adding that she is sickened by her job—doling out cash advances on credit cards. "But this is Cape Breton," she notes. "It's not like I have other opportunities."

Economic boon or curse? The debate has raged across the United States, where casinos now exist in 23 states. Instead of being beneficial to a community, says John Kindt, a professor of commerce and legal policy at the University of Illinois and author of several studies on the subject, casinos cost taxpayers as much as three dollars for every dollar the government reaps in revenues. According to Kindt's studies, they frequently lead to a loss of jobs from the surrounding region (because gamblers take disposable income to the casino), to increased crime, and to more social-welfare costs. And businesses near a casino can anticipate increased absenteeism, declining productivity and theft.



Casino Niagara: an army of concerned volunteers is trying to keep the menace at bay

THE WINNERS

Most of Canada's 55 casinos are relatively small operations. The top money-spinners are located where the most people are—especially American visitors. Casinos in the Ontario border cities of Niagara Falls and Windsor alone accounted for more than $1 billion of the industry's $2.5-billion take last year. The top eight casinos and their gross revenues last year, in millions:*

1. Casino Niagara	$512
2. Casino Windsor	497
3. Casino de Montréal	403
4. Casino Rama	371
5. Casino de Hull	149
6. Casino Regina	46
7. Casino Halifax	46
8. McPhillips Casino, Winnipeg	46

*profit margins vary, but governments and/or charities typically receive between 40 and 50 per cent of gross revenues

Easy access to credit compounds the problem. Many casinos themselves extend credit, at no interest, to be paid back within one to four weeks. 'Cashcall" machines at casinos permit loans of up to $70 for a fee of $14.25, or $7,050 for a fee of $179.25, and users are then subject to normal credit-card cash advance terms. Automated banking machines, which in casinos dispense money but will not accept deposits, are never more than a few feet from the slots, they have earned a reputation as the casinos' most dangerous machines.

Critics say bankruptcies have risen

But governments forge ahead. In British Columbia, where there are 17 charity casinos, the government is entertaining 32 proposals for new gaming venues, including what it calls "resort casino destinations." The government would keep two-thirds of the casino profits and divide the other third between the casino developers and local communities. In Ontario, where there are now four commercial casinos, the provincial government announced last year it would establish permanent charity casinos in 44 communities, which would allow charities across the province to earn up to $180 million a year (the government would pocket between $300 million and $1 billion). In non-binding plebiscites held during last autumn's municipal elections, 39 of those communities rejected the idea of a casino in their city (in spite of intense lobbying by the pro-gambling side, which typically spends $50 advancing its cause for every $1 spent by its opponents). But the government is now attempting to find more receptive host communities—and trying to sweeten the casino pot by increasing the cut they will receive.

In Alberta, a province with 17 casinos and 5,900 VLTs in licensed establishments, a 1996 study for the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission showed that eight per cent of teenagers in the province are problem gamblers, and more likely to get in trouble with the law (problem gamblers among the adult population number 5.4 per cent). In early April, at a casino in Kamloops, B.C., one college student gambled away his $1,000 student loan. A professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., says he saw students losing $500 to $600 a night at a 1997 charity casino held in the city. A comprehensive 1996 study by the National Council of Welfare called "Gambling in Canada" argues that "governments are ignoring, if not promoting, a new generation of problem gamblers."

Although casino promoters like to argue that they attract a well-heeled clientele, a visit to most of the country's casinos shows a blue-collar crowd at the slot machines. American studies, meanwhile, reveal that casinos get a quarter to half of their money from the five percent of the population that is at risk for problem gambling. Terry LaLiberte, a Vancouver criminal lawyer, has seen firsthand what he calls the social cost of feeding someone's addictions. Among his clients is a 45-year-old man who once had a heroin addiction. To get the drug, he burgled homes, stole from stores and committed fraud. Then he kicked that habit. "He went to a small B.C. town," LaLiberte says, "and was doing quite well away from drugs and alcohol." But in his spare time, the man began to frequent casinos, leading to a new addiction—and a new cycle of crime. "It's a real hypocrisy for the government—because they need more resources—to hide behind this bullshit idea that everyone has a right to gamble," LaLiberte says. "It's really a cash cow for them to milk."

Even as such stories multiply, organizations are launching new studies into the full impact of casinos. The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, for one, is now beginning a study of gambling by seniors. "If you go to a casino at any given time, there are a lot of seniors there, yet they rarely attend problem gambling clinics," says Gerry Kolesar, the foundation's co-ordinator of gambling programs. "We don't know why they don't, but maybe they are too proud, or feel they don't need to deal with the embarrassment or shame of accessing treatment at that stage in their life. We have calls from adults who are afraid their parents are spending their inheritance, but the parents don't want to come for treatment."

Across the country, casinos are sending buses to retirement homes, often for free, to fill up the stools in front of the slot machines. But seniors are not the only target group. Las Vegas-based Navegante, the American company that runs Casino Niagara, made no secret of its plans: it obtained explicit permission from the Ontario Casino Corp., the provincial overseer of casinos, to direct its marketing at neighboring U.S. states—and at the Asian community of Toronto (other casinos, Hull and Edmonton among them, have also made efforts to target Asians). "Gambling is, comparatively, a more acceptable social activity in the Chinese community," notes Rose Yu, a social worker with Chinese Family Life Services in Toronto, whose organization is just beginning to develop programs to treat gamblers with casino addictions. And Selina Volpatti, a Niagara Falls city councillor, expresses unease about the ethics of targeting one ethnic community. "If gambling is a problem in the Asian community," she asks, "should we be feeding into that problem?"

In casinos across Canada, meanwhile, loan sharks lurk among the players. They run a sophisticated operation, whipping out pocket-size photocopiers to copy the borrower's identification, and they do not like tardiness—one Toronto-based loan shark has "repossessed" a few dozen luxury cars while awaiting payments. And those payments can be steep. With a $1,000 loan, the shark withholds $100 right at the start—while a weekly 10-per-cent interest rate runs the balance up to $1,500 in a month. Officers from three different police forces explained the system to *Maclean's*, but none would go on record—fearful of the repercussions of embarrassing the provincial government. "It would be career suicide," says one officer.

For some law enforcement officials, the connection between the casinos and police is already too tight. In Windsor and Niagara Falls, the casino pays for the salaries, benefits, cars, bicycles, clothing and guns for an extra 25 regional police force officers to patrol the vicinity around the casino. Some officers say that such arrangements have muzzled them when it comes to speaking frankly about casinos' impact on their towns. When Ontario Liberal gambling critic Jim Bradley wrote and asked about casino-related crime last December, Niagara Regional Police Insp. Peter Gill responded that child abandonment was an unanticipated problem, leading to 11 charges—including one criminal charge of abandonment against a couple who left their two-year-old child sleeping in a casino arcade at 2:30 a.m. while they gambled two floors away.

But Gill said there had "not been an increase in violent crime." In fact, along with the 10-per-cent increase in Niagara Falls' overall crime rate, violent crimes went up 11 per cent in the first year the casino was open, at a time when the regional crime rate actually dropped by three per cent.

The biggest problem, casino opponents say, is that by the time studies prove conclusively that casinos are a drain on communities, it will be too difficult to close them down. Casinos have become part of the Canadian landscape. Alberta's West Edmonton Mall has a casino, Regina's old CPR train station is now a casino, street signs all over Montreal point the way to the casino. "How do you stop a casino?" asks Nancy Langille, a member of Citizens Against Gambling Expansion in Belleville, Ont. "Once the business is in place, there is no reverse gear, there are no brakes. Too many people—employees, suppliers—become dependent on them." Not to mention governments, who continue to push ahead with the great Canadian gamble. □



VLT players in Calgary: a particularly quick and nasty effect on problem gamblers

'The devil's television'

COVER

Gambling opponents nationwide target VLTs

Yaur Reznik doesn't get it. 'They call it gaming and games are supposed to be fun," muses the Halifax psychologist. 'But if you walk into where someone is playing a video gambling machine, there are no smiles, there is no eye contact. It's mindless activity. Insert coin, push start. Given a choice between sex and video gambling, they choose video gambling." Now retired from practice, Reznik is at the forefront of a fight in Nova Scotia to outlaw video lottery terminals. But the battle against the machines is being waged across Canada, in the eight provinces where they are legal. And as tales of woe emerge from the Prairies and the Maritimes, Ontario has been forced to rethink plans to scatter 20,000 VLTs across the province.

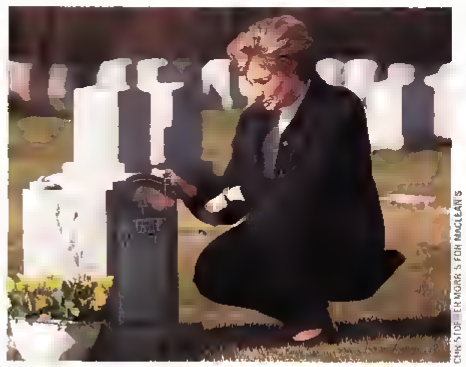
Among their opponents, VLTs are known as the "devil's television." They have a particularly quick and nasty effect on the five per cent of the population estimated by Ontario's Addiction Research Foundation to be potential problem gamblers. Some VLT addicts wear adult diapers to avoid trips to the washroom and stay in their chairs for up to 10 hours at a time. A suicide crisis line in Alberta is getting up to seven calls a day from people who say they are addicted to VLTs. After a VLT addict killed himself in Rocky Mountain House, a town of 5,800 people about 90 km west of Red Deer, Alta., the town voted in a plebiscite in February, 1997, to ban the machines within the town limits. And in Manitoba there have been six suicides linked to VLT addiction in the past two years, putting pressure on the province's chief medical examiner to call an inquest.

Before VLTs were legalized in Nova Scotia in 1991, Reznik was treating only one problem gambler—a bingo addict. Soon, his patients included more than 40 VLT addicts. "It could be anyone who has access to the machines," he says. "It's an addiction of opportunity—nice, honest, hardworking people are being turned into dysfunctional people." It is clear to Reznik, author of a self-help guide for addicts called *Video Gambling Addiction*, why people play the machines: not only do VLTs offer the thrill of gambling, they also exert a calming effect on anxious or depressed people and are popular with unhappy adolescents who lose themselves in the blinking lights. "VLTs have a very fast cycle of win and lose, the feedback is immediate and relatively small funds are being lost," Reznik notes. "It isn't long before the gambler is saying, 'This is my lucky day—the next one is definitely the winner'."

In Ontario, Conservative Premier Mike Harris's government had decided in 1996 to allow VLTs in the province. But in a confidential document circulated in early April and obtained by *Maclean's*, the ministry of consumer and commercial relations noted high rates of VLT addiction in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan. On the other hand, the document noted that slot machines appear to have a less-powerful effect on gamblers while VLTs have a hypnotic video display screen, a greater choice of games and can be played at least 20 times a minute, slots offer only single games that can be played just eight to 16 times a minute. The Harris government decided that, with a nod to the anti-gambling lobby, it would not put VLTs in bars, restaurants and hotels, but would instead opt for slot machines and restrict them to racetracks and charity casinos. Reznik scoffs at that decision: slots are slower and slightly less addictive, he says, but in the end they are "the same lady with a different disguise."

In some cases, the lady is deadly. Dennis Wynant, a self-confessed VLT addict from Winnipeg Beach, Man., killed himself last November after losing more than $125,000 on VLTs over three years. Recently retired after almost 25 years at Eaton's, where he was general manager for Western Canada, Wynant died in his car of carbon monoxide poisoning, leaving notes for his family and the media—and his wife $40,000 in debt. His son Glen, who says he has recovered from his own VLT addiction, said his father's note "told me to treat my wife with respect—quit gambling before it destroys me and my family." After his father's death and subsequent media coverage, Glen Wynant was flooded with calls from people who wanted to talk about their own gambling problems. Having learned of other deaths and suicide attempts, he has started a petition to put the question of a provincial ban on VLTs on the ballot for the next Manitoba election, expected this fall.

According to Sgt. Bob McDonald, head of the RCMP criminal intelligence service in Alberta, there are a lot of questions to be asked about VLTs. A survey of RCMP officers in the province found that the force has been called in to investigate a multitude of VLT-related crimes—robberies, thefts, assaults, mischief, fraud, bankruptcies, suspected arson, neglected children, missing persons and suicides. "A disturbing feature of many of our investigations," McDonald told a February conference on VLT and electronic gambling at the University of Alberta, is that many of those "implicated in VLT related occurrences or charged with criminal offenses related to VLT gambling had no previous involvement with the law." At the same time, he said, known criminals have been betting large amounts of money on VLTs, which makes RCMP investigators "wonder if criminals are committing more crimes to finance their participation in legal gambling."



CHRISTOPHER MORRIS FOR MACLEAN'S

Vineberg at son Trevor's grave: in four years, he lost $100,000

The Alberta government anticipates that it will take in $660 million from all forms of gaming in the current fiscal year—$16 million more than it expects in revenue from crude oil. Marcy Dibbs, a supervisor of problem gambling for the province's Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, which treats problem gamblers, is quick to point out that "95 per cent of the adult population does not have a problem. Gambling is a legitimate form of entertainment."

But McDonald disputes that, speculating that the problems are in fact more widespread. He wonders "how many gambling-related incidents go unreported to police."

The Roman Catholic bishops of Alberta have asked their congregations to think about whether gamblers are using food and rent money to feed VLTs. And Calgary oil man Jim Gray, one of the leaders of the anti-VLT movement in Canada, wants, among other things, an investigation into the connection "between surging VLT profits and the dwindling interest in sports franchises and cultural groups." Gray, chairman of a campaign to put a VLT ban in Calgary to a plebiscite this fall, argues that for each problem gambler, it may cost society up to $20,000 in police and court costs, workplace embezzlement, unpaid loans, welfare, bankruptcies, increased insurance fees, treatment and family breakups.

Phyllis Vineberg's story is a good example. Her son Trevor became addicted to VLTs in a Montreal arcade. In four years, he lost $100,000. Unable to overcome his addiction, he killed himself in July, 1995, at the age of 25. Vineberg says her son had plans to open a country inn, which could have created tax revenue and employment. Instead, for a year after his death Vineberg and her eight-year-old daughter visited the school social worker together, Vineberg consulted a psychiatrist, and regularly saw her family doctor to get medication for depression and sleeplessness. These sorts of costs far outweigh the $1.3 billion the Quebec government takes in gambling revenue every year, she says. "It was the loss of 40 years of productive life. And it's just one story."

But Jim Gray suggests that governments have lost the ability to assess any sort of rational argument. "Citizens have to make informed choices, and then force those choices upon our governments—because governments can't make them," Gray says. When it comes to gambling, he argues, the provinces are incapable of guarding "the essence of Canada"—striking a balance between a competitive economy and a caring society.

In Alberta, the citizens' movement has spread from Rocky Mountain House in early 1997 to chalk up similar victories in Sylvan Lake and Wood Buffalo. Anti-VLT activists in Edmonton and Medicine Hat, as well as Calgary, are circulating petitions to put the issue to plebiscites, while municipal councils in Lethbridge and Red Deer have already agreed to let the voters decide this fall. Gray feels 1998 is the year "the stars are lined up across the Canadian sky" for citizens to determine the future of VLTs.

In the Maritimes, people have been fighting VLTs since they day they were legalized. On April 1, the government of Prince Edward Island removed VLTs from corner stores after a doctor-led coalition determined that many Island families had been devastated by the machines. In New Brunswick, after much hand-wringing and pressure from an association representing corner store owners, the government announced in April it will remove VLTs gradually: only one will be allowed in any non-licensed establishment by the end of this year, and they will be removed totally from stores by October, 1999.

In Nova Scotia, where a 1996 study showed that 74 per cent of the $78 million annual VLT revenue came from problem gamblers, the government has taken the machines out of corner stores, although they remain in the province's two casinos and in bars and restaurants. In 1994, when Nova Scotians were debating whether the province should allow casinos, then-Finance Minister Bernie Boudreau raised eyebrows by arguing that casinos were necessary to generate revenue—in order to "pay for the addicts created by VLTs." In other words, more gambling to pay for the damage caused by gambling. For people like Jim Gray and his citizens' army, Canada has paid too much already.

JOHN NICOL



The casino: some patrons have had themselves legally barred

COVER

All night, every night

On April 7, Maclean's *Associate Editor Stephanie Nolen took the late-night bus from Toronto to Casino Rama, 155 km to the north on the Ojibwa native reserve. Her report on the year-round, 24-hour casino*

The streets of downtown Toronto are largely deserted when John pulls his bus out of the station. There are just a few passengers onboard his regular 10 p.m. run. John makes this trip every night of the week, dropping passengers in Barrie and Orillia, and, last stop, Casino Rama. This is a special bus: the free bus for gamblers bound for Rama, the casino pays the $9.95 fare. John has his regulars, like the grubby old man who sits mute in the front seat and the blond woman in the back row. "She takes this bus every night," John confides quietly, his voice rounded by a strong Scottish accent. "I think she may have a bit of a problem."

The casino looms suddenly out of the night like an enormous Wal-Mart, tarted up with winking white lights and covered in garish murals of native art. Well after midnight, the huge parking lot is still half full. John pulls the bus into one of the dozen bays in the back. An energetic young man leaps on and asks, "You playing?" Before I can answer, he shoves a voucher for $15 worth of free food in my hand. John points out where to catch the free bus back to Toronto, at 5:30 a.m. "Gets you back to Toronto just in time for work!" the fellow with the vouchers reminds us.

Inside, a bright young woman called Stephanie, a "host" on the graveyard shift, opens the glass doors into the cavernous casino. It is dark and smoky, and the noise is deafening: hundreds of slot machines whirring and pinging and beeping, the chink of quarters falling into the metal tray in front of a lucky winner, the "last bets" bellows from the roulette tables. It will be hours before I realize that, while the tables are jammed and the noise is pervasive, almost no one is talking. There are no clocks and no windows. It might be noon.

Colleen, 23, has arrived on John's bus. Until two weeks ago, she worked as a blackjack dealer in a Toronto charity casino called Sunshine, making about $11 an hour, including tips. Now, she has applied for employment insurance, having been laid off while the provincial government finalizes plans for permanent charity casinos. "I've never gone to a casino by myself so I'm sorta nervous." Colleen says, striding purposefully towards the blackjack tables. An hour later, armed with $260 withdrawn from a handy Bank of Nova Scotia automatic teller at the edge of the green baize card tables, she is breaking even, constantly clicking her red $5 chips into little piles while she keeps her eyes on the dealer. "The pop is free," she whispers, gesturing to a glass of ginger ale. "See that guy at the end of the table? He's lost $500 since we got here."

The man who is losing is Chinese. Stephanie says that Asian-Canadians from Toronto comprise at least half of Rama's clientele. She points out the Willow restaurant, where they serve "real Chinese food" and Asian patrons are tucking into black cod. The casino also has a staff of Asian hosts and dealers who cater to those clients. "They know the etiquette and the superstitions and stuff," Stephanie explains. In the roped-off high rollers room, where $100 bills sit in casual stacks, all the players are Asian. There is a lot of laughter around a high-stakes game of baccarat.

Back in the main casino, deep in the maze of slot machines, the scene is very different. Gamblers in cardigans and sweat suits slump in front of whirring machines, feeding in coins, sometimes straddling a chair to play two machines at once. Millie Hadley, 66, is playing the 25-cent slots. She comes a few nights a week. "I can't sleep at night since my husband died a year ago," explains Millie, who lives an hour away in Lindsay. She has won about $4,000 in recent weeks, but is unsure how much she spent to win it. "I guess I should keep track. I'm sure I lose more than I win."

Has Stephanie heard any horror stories, or seen regular clients become addicted? "We're in the entertainment business," she responds firmly. "We're not here to drain people's pockets." Then she mentions that a few patrons have had themselves legally barred from the casino—if they cannot manage to stay away, they are forcibly removed by police officers who patrol the gaming floor or by casino security. "Things like that, and when I see people losing every night and I know they don't have the money—then it's sort of sad," Stephanie says.

The noise is deafening at Casino Rama

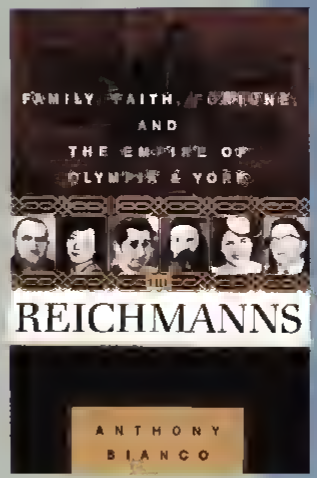
Just as Millie is showing her lucky stuffed pig, two burly casino security guards equipped with walkie-talkies appear beside us. They are polite but furious that I am talking to patrons unaccompanied by Rama public relations staff, and they demand that I stop. In a gesture of goodwill, they offer to let me keep my notebook before ejecting me. Outside, it is nearly dawn. The elegant female hostess of a Tai Pan Vacation tour bus kindly squeezes me into the last empty seat amid boisterous gamblers. Most of them doze off, waking in the semi-darkness at a succession of suburban Toronto malls, and getting into the BMWs and Saabs they have left parked there. "Next week," one man calls to the guide as he gets in his car. "Oh, every night," she replies quietly. All night, every night, at Casino Rama □

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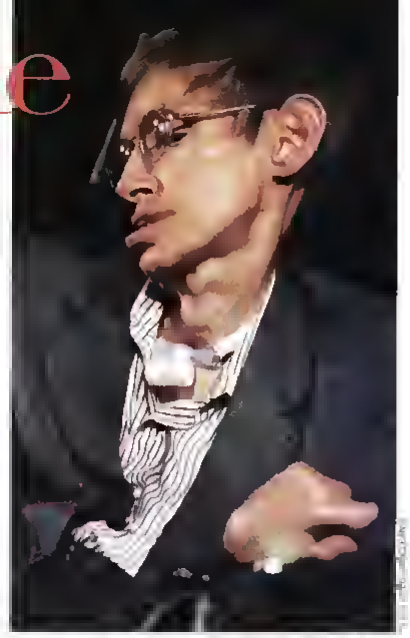
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People

Edited by
TANYA DAVIES

A night of celestial logic



Hawking, displaying wit as well as awesome genius

When **Stephen Hawking** spoke at the University of Toronto last week, 1,200 avid listeners had to strain their minds to follow his 90-minute lecture, dauntingly titled "The Theory of Everything." The superstar English physicist roamed through W and Z particles, P-branes, quantum chromodynamics, space-time continuums and boundaries of the universe. Fortunately, Hawking displayed wit as well as genius, prompting the capacity crowd—which had paid between $28 and $69.50 for tickets—to frequently erupt into laughter. Speaking of electromagnetism, he noted: "The attractions and repulsions between the particles in two large bodies will cancel almost exactly—unlike gravitational forces between the particles, which will all be attractive. That is why one falls towards the earth, and not towards the television set."

In fact, the lecture had been pre-recorded. Hawking, 56, is seriously disabled from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease, a progressive neurological disorder. He is confined to a motorized wheelchair, and has relied on a computerized voice synthesizer since being treated for pneumonia in 1985. At the end of his Toronto presentation—which he made en route to the inauguration of Ontario's Sudbury Neutrino Observatory, a research facility for probing the secrets of the universe—the physicist answered questions from the audience, painstakingly tapping out replies at the rate of 15 words a minute. But Hawking's sense of humor was still in evidence. Asked about the possibility of human time travel, he gave a technical explanation, concluding it was impossible for humans. After a pause, he added with a smile: "Otherwise, we would have tourists from the future."

Widely regarded as the most important physicist since **Albert Einstein**, Hawking was stricken with ALS when he was in his early 20s. He nonetheless went on to do groundbreaking work on black holes, which are believed to be collapsed stars, dispelling the belief that nothing escapes from them by discovering that they emit radiation. And in 1988, his reputation skyrocketed with the publication of *A Brief History of Time*, a simplified—though still hard slog ging—description of the nature of time and the universe, which has sold more than 10 million copies. Hawking now holds the prestigious post of Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University, a chair once held by his hero, physicist Sir **Isaac Newton**. A father of three grown children, Hawking is married to his second wife, **Elaine Mason**, formerly one of his nurses.

In addition to black holes, Hawking has focused his attention on the size of the universe, arguing that it has no boundaries. During last week's lecture, Hawking told the audience: "It is such an elegant explanation, I'm sure God would have chosen it." How can mere mortals argue with that logic?



A highly diplomatic *merci*

Gov. Gen. **Roméo LeBlanc** inducted pop diva **Celine Dion** into the Order of Canada last week—and sealed it with a kiss. The honor was her second in as many days. Twenty-four hours earlier, Premier **Lucien Bouchard** gave the Charlemagne, Que., native the Order of Quebec—and a handshake. As federalists and separatists vied to claim Dion, 30, as their own, the singing sensation brushed aside attempts to politicize her investitures.

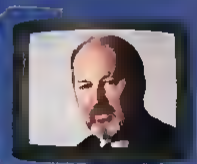
Dion, LeBlanc: no politicizing her honors

"It doesn't matter if it's the government of Quebec, Canada or France honoring me, I see it as an award coming from the public," said Dion. She was not always so diplomatic. During Canada Day celebrations in 1992, Dion raised sovereigntist hackles when she told her audience, "I'm against separation." But last week in Ottawa, she was much more careful. "Of course, I'm from Quebec,' she said. "But when people ask me everywhere, I'm a Quebecer or I'm a Canadian, I am both and I'm very proud of that."

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Maclean's TV

Ann Dowsett Johnston



A degree of imagination

By most people's standards, Sheldon Levy should be one happy camper. Here is a guy who, on a warm spring night in Oakville, Ont., has Hollywood eating out of his hand. Huddled in his college's cafeteria are industry hotshots, scrambling to hire his grads—the stars of Sheridan College's renowned computer graphics and animation programs. Over by the pop machines is Fox's Paul Newberry, one of the directing animators of *Anastasia*. Across the room sits Charlie Bonifacio, head-banging with his crew from Disney. Both have scrutinized six hours of students' demo reels, both are racing to meet a 6:30 deadline—the witching hour when a cardboard box marked "Interview requests" will be carted away and the courting will begin. Does Newberry have a favorite? "Yeah," he whispers, with a territorial glance over his shoulder. "If I had a cell phone, I'd be calling to say, 'Get this guy a visa!' "

Employers chasing grads? The scene has a delicious, almost surreal quality in the late 1990s. But the president of Sheridan is far from happy. If Levy had his way, those grads would be heading off not just with jobs, but with applied degrees to boot. "Hands down, our program is one of the best in the world," says Levy. "Programs of this calibre have degree designations around the world. It's insulting."

What sticks in Levy's craw is the fact that, in Ontario, colleges are seen as the poor country cousins. When it comes to building sophisticated, student-friendly links between colleges and universities, Ontario is Canada's last dinosaur. No other province has been so rigid in protecting the moat around the university fortress. British Columbia, Alberta and Nova Scotia all have system-wide agreements allowing for transfers between colleges and universities. But in Ontario, the moat was there from the get-go—a fact that troubled few in the kinder, gentler years of the mid-'60s when the colleges were set up as terminal programs to supply skilled people to the workforce. The jargon of lifelong learning had yet to make headlines, and "educational apartheid," as one wag put it, may have made sense. Now, with students scrambling for both degrees and diplomas just to get into the employment queue, the notion is dated at best.

Truth is, Ontario ordered a review of its system a decade ago. Vision 2000, a report to the government in 1989, recommended that the province establish an "institute without walls," one that would promote co-operation between colleges and universities, and have unique degree-granting power. Needless to say, the institute was never established. And while there have been worthy initiatives between individual schools, the overall picture is spotty.

Well, if the mountain won't come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. That's the tack that Levy is taking this week when he and Tom Traves, president of Halifax's Dalhousie University, make their opening bid for "Dal at Sheridan." The two—former colleagues at York University in Toronto—will make a presentation to the Ontario ministry of education for their integrated, interprovincial arrangement. Sheridan students, having earned a three-year diploma in business, tailored to the Dalhousie curriculum, will spend an additional year earning a Dalhousie business degree on their own campus. In other words, they will graduate with both sets of parchment in only four years. And let's be honest. "Sheridan at Dal" is more than just a twinkle in Traves's eye. Given his university's strength in computer science, it would make great sense for Dalhousie to host a world-class computer animation and digital media program in Halifax.



Levy: trying to break the degree-granting monopoly

In his lobby to break the degree-granting monopoly in Ontario, Levy holds one crucial trump card: when it comes to education, Premier Mike Harris is a true believer in the gospel of job-readiness. In the recent throne speech, the jargon of lifelong learning was repeated like a mantra. Who better than Harris to buy Levy's argument on revisiting degree assessment—namely, if a thing walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it just might *be* a duck?

Clearly, the Dalhousie arrangement is happening by default, and the sooner Ontario universities demonstrate academic generosity by agreeing to a program of quality assessment, the more likely a constructive outcome. For the moment the greatest fear is that Harris will act precipitously. "There is a lot at stake," says James Downey, president of the University of Waterloo. "Colleges feel the attack on their integrity, and universities are, correctly, protective of their right to award the degree credential."

But the question is: are some trying to shut the barn door on degree-granting after the walls have come down, and the horses have fled? Athabasca University, an Alberta-based distance educator, has signed agreements with 22 of Ontario's 25 community colleges. Meanwhile, the University of Phoenix, whose main focus is adult learners seeking business degrees, has received approval to open a site in the Vancouver area this fall, and has a similar application on the table in Ontario. And while those names may not threaten more traditional universities, several highly prestigious American institutions are preparing to experiment with open learning in the near future. To name two: Yale is proceeding aggressively with a series of academic programs on the Internet, and the Harvard business school is extremely active in technology-based outreach.

James Duderstadt, president emeritus of the University of Michigan and a member of Yale's advisory board on information technology, warns that while the market is forcing more variety in the system, it is also accelerating the pace of change. "For that reason, traditional research universities are at risk if they simply hide behind their prestige, and ignore the broader transformation in society," says Duderstadt. "The key is to act, preferably by forming alliances and providing leadership."

It may be true, as one university president cursed, that "damn few college programs are as fine as Sheldon's animation program." But for the sake of students—already shouldering more than their fair share of the burden—let the assessment process begin. If the system is fair-minded, there should be no unduly easy passages between colleges and universities, but nor should there be dead ends. Right now the only failures in Ontario are those of leadership and imagination.

Books

Do worry, be happy

An author argues that contentment takes work

BETTER LIVING: IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS FROM PLATO TO PROZAC
By Mark Kingwell
(Viking, 408 pages, $32)

Happiness, as a now-forgotten Irish bishop once said, is no laughing matter. Mark Kingwell would probably agree. He has written a big, earnest but engaging book dissecting the culture's current obsession with getting happy. As its title suggests, *Better Living: In Pursuit of Happiness from Plato to Prozac* is both hiply up-to-date, and rooted in the long view—rather like Kingwell himself. The 35-year-old University of Toronto philosophy professor is as likely to be writing in *Saturday Night* magazine about pop TV as in a scholarly journal, setting out his ideas in a swift, synthesizing style that must be the envy of many of his academic colleagues. In *Better Living* he demonstrates an impressive familiarity with such au courant phenomena as mood-altering drugs and Armani suits, but his deepest loyalty is to such ancient thinkers as Epicurus and Plato. In fact, beneath his urbane nonchalance, Kingwell is really a classical moralist.

To research his book, Kingwell—author of *Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink* (1996), played around a bit. He took Prozac, though he didn't need it. He tried lying and stealing, in small ways, in order to test the moral component of happiness. He even took a self-actualization course at a Massachusetts psychotherapy centre called The Option Institute. Mostly, though, he read, thought and kept an eye on his own life as an urbanite with a wife, no children and persistent insecurity about his failure to win a permanent teaching post (since the book appeared he has won tenure). By such means he came to the conclusion that current notions of happiness are so deeply flawed as to be "pathological"—a favorite Kingwell term—and ultimately damaging for the societies that so unthinkingly embrace them.

The problem, Kingwell argues, is that Western consumerist culture has come to identify happiness with all the wrong things: buying bigger and better toys, and the instant gratification of 'feel-good' experiences from bungee-jumping to short-cut therapies. He thinks this consumerist bingeing undermines collective life while making people no happier (and probably less so) than before. He even pulls some impressive statistics which suggest people 50 years ago, while possessing much less in the way of material goods, were more content.



Kingwell: a search that included drugs, therapy and Greek thinkers

That may not be a particularly original insight, but Kingwell shines at exploring how society got into this state. A fine teacher, he explains how the thinking of such figures as Hobbes, Locke, Mill and Freud gradually redefined the very notion of what a human being was. Gradually, they abandoned the soul-possessing person of the Middle Ages, enmeshed in a hierarchy of responsibilities and loyalties. And in its place they put an autonomous individual defined mainly by his appetites. This is where today's much-heralded consumer comes from, the acquisitive figure in whose name neo-con governments are undermining such collective enterprises as health care and threatening to replace them with market-driven alternatives.

Kingwell is at his best dissecting the role of advertising in driving consumer overspending. His clever exploration of the whole illusion of "cool" as manufactured by the pushers of fashion gear is one of the best things in the book. But his witty deconstructions point to an old-fashioned moral message—by refusing to think about what happiness really is, people are letting marketers lure them into a state of perpetual, envious dissatisfaction.

Overall, it is a bleak picture—but it may well be even bleaker than Kingwell imagines. One thing *Better Living* lacks is a sense of wider context. For as the entire world gets pulled into the consumer rat race (as the proponents of the global economy cheerfully foresee), both the environment and the integrity of traditional cultures will come under unprecedented siege.

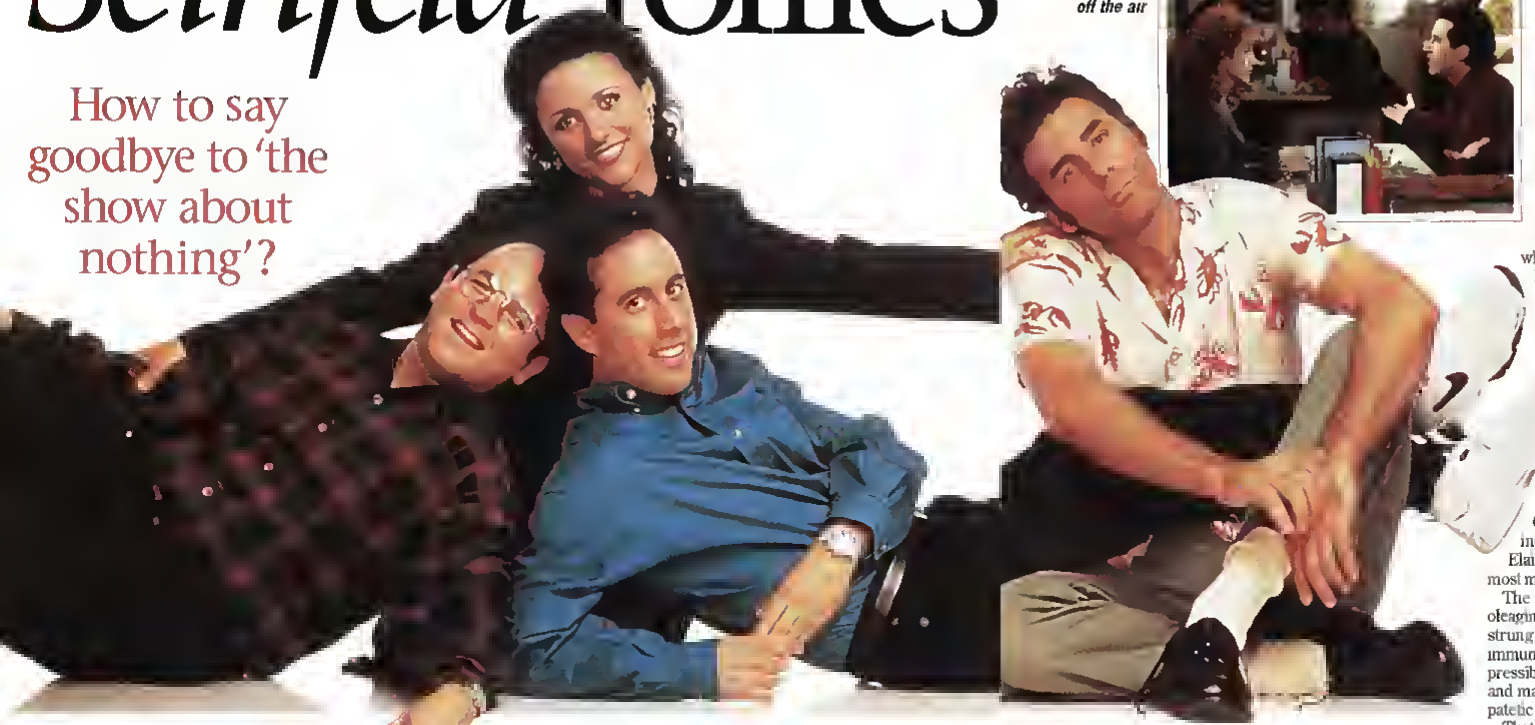
So what is the solution? Certainly not more Prozac: it only made Kingwell depressed. And not the easy nostrums of the Option Institute, from which he retreated in cynicism and loathing. What he does advocate is rebellion of a sort: blocking the signals of the consumerist culture with some critical, self-aware thinking. He also urges his readers to rediscover the much harder, but ultimately more satisfying, path to contentment urged by ancient philosophers: the active happiness of a person who cultivates sane living and is inspired by a considered sense of what is just and good. Approvingly, Kingwell quotes the Greek philosopher Epicurus: "It is not possible to live pleasantly without living intelligently and finely and justly."

Kingwell has his blind spots. He is irritatingly vague about what a truly happy life might look like. Except for the ancients, he ignores how other cultures have tackled the happiness problem. And he is unappreciative of the counterbalancing role both altruism and a sense of the sacred play in many people's lives. But *Better Living* is a welcome and necessary book all the same: a cold shower for the dubious pleasures of the consumerist frenzy.

JOHN BEMROSE

Seinfeld follies

How to say goodbye to 'the show about nothing'?





Alexander, Louis-Dreyfus, Seinfeld, chards (below): it is impossible to imagine George, Elaine, Jerry and Kramer getting misty-eyed over some program going off the air

BY JOE CHIDLEY

The scene opens with Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer standing around at a party. Enter Banta, an unfunny comedian Jerry not-so-secretly hates who starts talking about this TV show—let's call it Steinfield*—and how much he loves it and how it's going off the air and what is he going to do when it's gone? Jerry and Elaine roll their eyes, Kramer turns to tuck into the party snacks. George walks off to hit on a statuesque blond. Finally, Banta leaves, saying something like,"Gotta go—the show starts in 20 minutes."*

George (to blond), "My name's Buck—Buck Naked. Pornographic movie star."

Kramer (to no one in particular): "These pretzels are making me thirsty!"

Elaine to Jerry (following Banta with her eyes): "What's up with that?"

Jerry (bored): "Yada yada yada."

OK, so that probably will not be a scene in the too-much-talked-about final episode of *Seinfeld*, the hit NBC sitcom which is bowing out on May 14 after nine neurotic seasons. But it's hard not to wish that something like it *would* be in there—some acknowledgment from the always-contrarian *Seinfeld* clan that all the hype about the end of the show has gotten a little out of hand. In the past few weeks, Jerry Seinfeld (co-creator of his eponymous sitcom along with veteran TV producer Larry David, and master of his comedic domain) has been on the cover of *Vanity Fair* and *Newsweek*. His show has been the subject of tribute issues of *Entertainment Weekly* and *TV Guide*, while a host of quickie mags, one even published by sometime pornographer Larry Flynt, have been hustled onto newsstands. The network, meanwhile, is expecting audiences in the tens of millions on that fateful evening, and charging advertisers big bucks for the right to peddle their wares during The Biggest Event in the History of Television. "Thursdays will never be the same!" cry the headlines. "Seinfeld forever!" "Jerry's last stand!"

Enough already. Imagine Jerry, Elaine, George and Kramer—respectively played by Seinfeld, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Jason Alexander and Michael Richards—watching TV in Jerry's New York City apartment and getting all misty-eyed because some program is going off the air. It would never happen. Sentimentality and nostalgia are fodder for *other* sitcoms—the cast of *Friends* can't get through an episode without at least one good hug, and Tim Allen's *Home Improvement* indulges in moral conundrums about parenthood and marriage. None of that for the *Seinfeld* regulars, who wouldn't know a dewy sentiment if it was somehow transported into their self-absorbed minds. After all, this is—or was—a show whose cardinal rule was "No lessons, no hugs."

American television has long been big on "events," especially when it comes to its top-rated sitcoms. Witness the media circus around the final episode of another NBC show, *Cheers*, five years ago, or the over-long and dreary finale of *M*A*S*H* in 1983—still a historic farewell in the annals of TV, watched by nearly half the population of the United States. Neither of those beloved end-of-an-era shows was very good. With luck, *Seinfeld*'s finale will be better, and avoid the familiar pitfall of taking itself too seriously.

And anyway, TV hit status has always seemed to fit the cast and characters of *Seinfeld* like an ill-tailored puffy shirt (remember Episode 63?). Compared with the big sitcoms of yesteryear—*Mary Tyler Moore*, *M*A*S*H*, *Cheers*—the show is an anomaly, a sour, absurdist romp where the others were substitute families. Even today, *Seinfeld* stands out as odd—and oddly un-influential. Other sitcoms have adhered to the safe conventions of the genre, hitting the audience over the head with jokes and emotional "moments." Which raises a question: why is *Seinfeld*, which runs counter to TV trends and manages to offend as often as it entertains, so popular? Like, what's up with that?

A dissenting voice among the accolades surrounding The End is cultural critic Camille Paglia, who wrote in the online magazine *Salon* that "*Seinfeld* can go out with an hour-long Hitchcockian focus on a bloody, swirling tub drain, for all I care." The show, she added, "lacks the emotional breadth and timeless, universal appeal of a truly great television series like *I Love Lucy*." What Paglia fails to point out is that the TV landscape has changed since the 1950s. Now with dozens of channels on cable and satellite, a TV show can have a relatively small audience and still be a hit—as long as it attracts the right demographic.

For *Seinfeld*, particularly in the early years, that demographic was young urban males, a group sought after by advertisers, but one also responsible for making *Twin Peaks* a hit and keeping *Star Trek* reruns on the air. In other words, the rise of *Seinfeld* was a cult phenomenon. Look at the way it whined itself into the parlance of younger viewers, any of whom gets the joke when another says 'No soup for you!" (from Episode 110, the beloved "Soup Nazi" show) or "hand" (from Episode 31, wherein George complains he has "no hand," or power, in his current romance) or "master of my domain," a euphemism for masturbation from Episode 49, when the four regulars take bets on who can abstain the longest.

The genius of the show lies in the fact that, even as it became a mass Thursday ritual, it stuck to those off-kilter roots, countering and implicitly criticizing the disingenuous moralizing of the '90s. While America elected an I-feel-your-pain president in Bill Clinton, Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer stubbornly stuck to being pains in the butt. There's Jerry, obsessed with hygiene and at once enthralled and repelled by women. George, the orally fixated nebbish who goes out of his way to indulge his two passions—food and sex—at the same time. Elaine, who can't stop complaining. And Kramer, perhaps the most moral of the bunch, but completely nuts to boot.

The point is, *Seinfeld* regulars—along with supporters like the oleaginous postman Newman (Wayne Knight) and George's high-strung parents (Jerry Stiller and Estelle Harris)—have remained immune to the demands of 'character development." Those irrepressible eccentrics take Seinfeld's trademark observational humor and make it hilarious, but also disturbing. Their pettiness and pathetic fortunes hint at the casual insanity of modern life.

That subversive element is not likely to be found in the tributes and special issues. But finales and the carefully orchestrated buzz around them, have always been about money, as networks and producers try to eke out the last dollar from a dying franchise. For the rights to advertise during *Seinfeld*'s hour-long farewell, NBC is charging $2 million per 30-second spot. (Global, which simulcasts *Seinfeld* in Canada, is charging $145,000 per ad.) And then there's syndication. Even as hype over the finale has gained momentum, *Seinfeld*'s distributor, Columbia TriStar, has been negotiating with broadcasters over the rights to its second cycle of reruns (the first cycle ends on May 14). The syndication windfall has been estimated at $2.2 billion, with Seinfeld and David (who left the show after the seventh season, but returned to help write the finale) taking home as much as $280 million each.

That's a lot of money, but still no reason to get too wrapped up in the fin-de-siècle fever going around these days. It all seems so un-*Seinfeld*-ian. So how to respond to the end of the era? Here's a suggestion: watch the finale, take a deep breath and—like the foursome did when George's fiancée died from licking cheap envelopes—utter a half-muted, bemused "Oh." Then maybe go grab a coffee. Remember that life goes on. And so do reruns. □

Passion meets pulp

BY BRIAN D. JOHNSON

LES MISERABLES
Directed by Bille August

Here is a picture with pedigree. It is based on Victor Hugo's monumental 1862 novel, a discursive saga that, like a French *Moby Dick*, is more often admired than read. The title is also a brand name, thanks to the megamusical affectionately known as *Les Miz*, which has been seen by some 40 million people. And after half a dozen film and TV abridgements of the story, this new, non-musical adaptation of *Les Miserables* is, by all appearances, a class act. Heading up an impressive cast, Liam Neeson shoulders the role of Jean Valjean, the lion-hearted ex-convict who cannot escape his past. Geoffrey Rush, the Oscar-winning star of *Shine* (1996), portrays Inspector Javert, the vengeful lawman who obsessively pursues him. Uma Thurman and Claire Danes play the distressed damsels, Fantine and Cosette. And behind the camera is the eminent Danish director Bille August (*Pelle the Conqueror*, *The Best Intentions*), who has an Oscar and two Palmes d'or from Cannes to his credit.

For all those who could not get enough of *Les Miz*, the new film will flesh out the narrative and rekindle a passion for the characters. The performances are solid. The story, adapted by American screenwriter Rafael Yglesias (*Fearless*), moves along at a decent clip. And the period vistas glide by with appropriate grace. But beneath the vivid storytelling and sweeping images, it all feels strangely hollow and unsatisfying.

Streamlining Hugo's massive novel, the script cuts quite literally to the chase—focusing on the cat-and-mouse contest between Valjean and Javert. As the film begins, Valjean is an escaped convict who has spent years in prison for snatching a loaf of bread. While on the run, he is transformed by an act of compassion, and the ignoble savage reinvents himself as a benevolent bourgeois, a well-liked industrialist and mayor. Years later, recognized by Javert, his former prison guard, he is forced to flee—scooping up Cosette, the orphan daughter of the battered prostitute Fantine, who has died in his arms.

There is a fine line between passion and pulp. And the first sign that the balance is askew comes with Thurman's spirited portrayal of the wretched Fantine as a wild mix of *misérable* and *désirable*, lying on her deathbed, half-bared breasts glistening with an artful smear of blood and sweat. This movie is a closet melodrama, one that dresses its emotional extremes in a stern, dignified realism.

Neeson plays Valjean with the same brute tenderness that he brings to all his roles, from Oskar Schindler to Rob Roy. Chalk up another hard-earned triumph of the human spirit. But behind the workmanlike intensity, the hulking virtue, it is hard to find evidence of an inner life. Rush, meanwhile, strains to complicate Javert's villainy with telling shades of vulnerability, but the script doesn't give him much room. Even the usually superb Danes, playing the sheltered beauty who falls dangerously in love with the revolutionary firebrand Marius, seems off—her English accent suffers from a distracting emphasis on diction.



Neeson: an ignoble savage reinvents himself

Everyone speaks with an English accent, which has long been the Euro-currency of period films. Presumably, the idea is to instil a sense of Old World uniformity, and avoid a menagerie of bad French accents. August has had a poor track record directing in English—both *The House of the Spirits* (1992) and *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1997) were miserable failures. He fares better this time, crafting a perfectly reasonable facsimile of a well-worn tale. And who knows? Like the musical, it could even turn out to be a crowd-pleaser, a *misérable* success.

A tale of merry pranksters

SHOOTING FISH
Directed by Stefan Schwartz

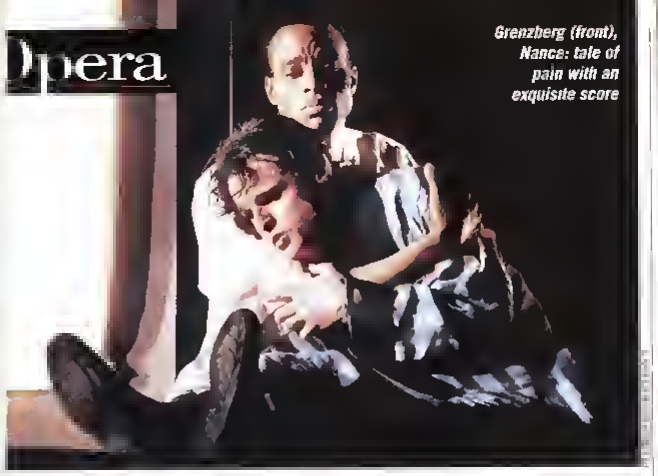
The British seem to have developed a knack for making plucky little comedies about men with screwball schemes to make money. Last year, *The Full Monty* steamed up the box office with a troupe of steelworkers stripping for their supper. Now *Shooting Fish*, another Brit flick that seems to have come out of nowhere, presents two prankster con men who turn swindling into a kind of performance art. This is a featherweight romp, without the populist punch of *The Full Monty*. It is not about to take the world by storm. But, despite a script that frays at the end, *Shooting Fish* has energy, charm and a nimble wit.

Dylan (Dan Futterman), a silver-tongued salesman, and Jez (Stuart Townsend), a shy techno-wizard, are orphans happily stuck in a state of arrested adolescence. Living together in a London pad, they work a myriad of eccentric fraud schemes. Their scams include selling a "voice recognition computer" by performing ventriloquism from a back room, making outraged phone calls to score free theatre tickets, and going door-to-door, selling the same batch of insulation to a series of unsuspecting housewives by passing it through adjoining attics.

Along the way, Dylan and Jez pick up an accomplice, a smart, sexy medical student named Georgie (Kate Beckinsale). Both vie for her attention, and when they trip up with one of their imperfect crimes, it is she who holds the key to their survival. Beckinsale (*Cold Comfort Farm*) is outstanding—one of those fresh, yet sly, and utterly beguiling English actresses who looks as if she has the world on a kite string.

Director and co-writer Stefan Schwartz has concocted a bright, kooky confection, but he lays on the icing a bit too thick with the ending. The finale includes a bewildering tangent that makes sentimental use of Down's syndrome children. By then, however, the raggedness of the script seems like just another scam—forgivable mischief in the name of fun.

B.D.J.



Grenzberg (front), Nance: tale of pain with an exquisite score

Opera

African triangle

It is probably the only opera in existence that has a character eating live monkey brains. *Elsewhereless*, the new one-act work by Vancouver-based composer Rodney Sharman and Oscar-nominated Toronto filmmaker Atom Egoyan, abounds in indelicate situations—but extremely delicate music. Set in an isolated, unnamed African country on the verge of mass civil slaughter, the opera revolves around an acerbic Canadian diplomat, Antoine (Benoit Boutet), his gay lover, Eugene (Willy Grenzberg), and their native servant, Malcolm (Marcus Nance). Malcolm's dream of going "elsewhere" to university depends upon a letter of recommendation, which Antoine never writes. Shifting back and forth in time over the course of 10 years, the plot gradually pieces together a triangle of love and betrayal whose painful aftermath finds Malcolm and his new employers—a young female diplomat and her husband—held hostage to Antoine's past.

Atom Egoyan and Rodney Sharman evoke love's extremes

True to operatic tradition, *Elsewhereless*—playing at Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre until May 16 and moving to the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on July 16—embodies extremes. Banality and poetry, horror and beauty are in constant juxtaposition. The Malcolm story is just one layer. Phillip Barker's eloquent black-and-white film images, projected onto a screen at the front of the stage, go deeper: the faces of African children staring out at the audience sometimes seem more human than the ascetic, almost stylized, characterizations onstage.

But it is Sharman's exquisite score, alternately spare and sensual, that ultimately pulls the elements together into more universal emotional territory. The tender, erotic waltz theme that accompanies Malcolm's dance lesson with Eugene—and returns when he reinvents that moment for his new employer—is a finely wrought and psychologically telling moment, one that makes clear Malcolm and Eugene's relationship was far from casual. Sharman's odd but elegant orchestration (two flutists doubling on alto and bass flute, two bass clarinets, harp, guitar, mandolin, violin, double bass and percussion) plays no small role, allowing him to create an unusually rich palette of instrumental color.

Based on a never-produced 1982 play by Egoyan, *Elsewhereless* exhibits many of his trademark qualities: the cool, ironic eye, the shifting chronological perspectives—elements that make this opera unequivocally contemporary. As Malcolm, Nance affectingly conveys his character's journey from guilelessness to a sadder, wiser detachment. Grenzberg is a touching Eugene, while Boutet is wonderfully arch as the embittered, unstable Antoine.

After its Canadian run, which includes a stop in Vancouver next spring, *Elsewhereless* travels to Rome and Amsterdam, and is under consideration by houses in Paris and Brussels. Unlike its characters, this opera is having no trouble getting elsewhere.

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The unalloyed joy of being John Bassett

One day the Seaforth Highlanders, in the North Europe theatre of war under Col Budge Bell-Irving of Vancouver, were prepared to attack at dawn. Maj John Bassett asked why they always had to attack at dawn. Well, it was explained, that was in the military manual. Bassett hated mornings. Why, he suggested, do we not have a good lunch, a small snooze, and then sally forth?

At 4 p.m., the Seaforths came upon, on a wonderful sunny day, 200 young German soldiers in their shorts sleeping on a grassy riverbank. Not a shot was fired. No one was killed. "Attack at dawn!" Bassett used to gloat at his dinner parties 40 years later.

One night, on his TV interview show, Pierre Berton had prepared a zinger for his opening question. "Isn't it true, Mr Bassett," he pounced, "that as owner of the *Toronto Telegram* you use it to punish your enemies and praise your friends?" Bassett replied: "Of course. Why else would you want to own a newspaper?" Berton managed to get through the rest of the interview.

One day in 1989, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney rewarded Bassett for his long loyalty to the Conservatives by appointing him, at age 74, to a three-year-term as chairman of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, which oversees the nation's domestic spy agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Beverly Rockett, the fashion photographer, confided at a party: "Well, he'll certainly be good at keeping secrets. He told me about the appointment at a cocktail party two weeks ago."

One Monday morning, in a rage, Bassett called all his senior editors into his office. On the floor he had a copy of *The Toronto Star* and his *Toronto Telegram*. He put his foot on the *Star* and intoned that this was a real paper because of the major scoop it had on page 1. And this, he shouted, kicking at the *Tely* in contempt, is not a real paper because we don't have on our front page what they have on their front page. He raged on for 20 minutes. When he stopped, a senior Tely editor said: "Sir, the reason that story isn't on the front page of your paper is because we had it on the front page of your paper on Saturday." Bassett never blinked, and with that 100-watt smile, said: "Gentlemen, happiness is when your publisher is full of shit. Meeting dismissed."



ROY PETERSON

One night at the Albany Club, the den of Toronto Torydom, at a black-tie dinner where all the Tory toffs sat at the head table, Brian Mulroney told a story: when John Diefenbaker became PM in 1957, Bassett and Finlay MacDonald came to his office. They explained, as loyal Conservative supporters, they weren't coming to plea for Senate appointments, ambassadorships, lucrative contracts. All they wanted, explained Mulroney, was "a couple of those little TV licences." Which turned both of them, of course, into millionaires.

One day in 1971, he folded the *Tely* and accepted $10 million for the "sale" of the paper's subscription list to *The Toronto Star*. Doug Creighton, leader of a small group of Tely editors who thought, vainglorously, they could start a tabloid on the ashes of the *Tely*, took Bassett out for a drink.

"After the two first martinis," he remembers, "I convinced him to give us all the *Tely* newspaper boxes in town. After the third mart, I persuaded him to gift us the *Tely* library." Bassett's generosity—and the marts—is the only thing that allowed the *Toronto Sun* to birth the following Monday. The founders worshipped him.

One weekend, Bassett invited a columnist and Julian Porter, the libel lawyer, to his retreat in the Caledon Hills north of Toronto for a grudge tennis match. Bassett, his knees crippled by arthritis, could not move but, with his six-four height, just stood at the net and batted down whatever came within his tremendous reach. Unbeknownst to his innocent rivals, he had hired a Canadian Davis Cup junior in the backcourt who could run like a rabbit and retrieve until the sun came down. They won of course and he spent the rest of the weekend gloating, with that 100-watt smile.

One night, he and the equally handsome MacDonald, who as young officers in Holland had wooed and won most of the maidens in Paris, were in a Toronto nightclub, listening to their favorite chanteuse. He had just caused a major Toronto social scandal by leaving his wife to marry a beautiful blond *Tely* reporter 20 years younger who, as Isabel Bassett, is now Ontario's culture minister.

A group of six prominent Rosedale socialites came through the door. Knowing their new feelings about him, Bassett stood up and shouted, "Ya Ya Ya!" They all turned and fled.

One night Big John and Isabel heard a speech in a private Toronto salon by a very witty, dynamic new face from Vancouver. Name of Kim Campbell. They were so overwhelmed that they mounted money for her as the obvious new Tory leader—their clout so much they killed off better candidates.

John Bassett died last week at 82. At his funeral there were two ex-PMs and the wife of a third. The two hymns were appropriate: *Rock of Ages* and *Fight the Good Fight*. He was a zinger of a personality.

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